

CASTLE BAYNARD;

OR,

THE DAYS OF JOHN.

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LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. AND W. B. WHITTAKER
AVE-MARIA-LANE.

MDCCLXXIV.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES,
Northumberland-court.

To

Alfred,

This little Volume

is

Dedicated,

by

His affectionate Brother,

The Author.



CASTLE BAYNARD

CHAPTER I.

Launce. ——— My staff understands me.

Speed. What thou sayest?

Launce. Ay, and what I do, too : look thee, I'll
but lean, and my staff understands me.

Speed. It stands under thee, indeed.

Launce. Why, stand under, and understand, is all one

Speed. But tell me true, will't be a match?

Two Gentlemen of Veron

Yes, forsooth, I will hold my tongue, so your
face bids me, though you say nothing.—*King Lear.*

“ **T**HOU art a brave man, Gilbert, in verity a brave man; but truly, now, where didst thou find this same courage which hath induced thee to declare thyself an intended husband?” These words, uttered in a merry, bantering strain, were addressed by Walter Hardie, a stout, robust young man, with a countenance full of health and good-humour, embrowned by the suns of five and twenty summers, to Gilbert, surnamed the Gosling, his junior by three or four years, a simple

swain, of a pale complexion, light blue eyes and straight flaxen hair, hanging down his shoulders.

“Lord! thou’rt such a wag!” cried Gilbert, in a soft, drawling tone, hanging his head a little on one side, with his hands crossed in front, and twisting one thumb over the other; “and then thou makest one laugh so. I shall never forget when thou told’st the merry tale of the Dog and the Giblets, when Nick and Jasper supped with us at farmer Hedge’s, and how thou didst gobble up the coney pie while we were laughing. I thought I never should ha’ shut my mouth again.” And he concluded by laughing, at least his muscles made a certain motion like it, but his voice refused the accompaniment of ha! ha! and a kind of low quick breathing alone was audible,—this Walter used to call silent approbation. It was this peculiar way of expressing his joy which obtained him the nickname of Gosling, and if he had never shut his mouth, but continued to laugh at Walter’s joke, his mirth would have been a very trifling inconvenience, or perhaps enjoyed by himself unnoticed by the rest of the company, for his loudest laugh never exceeded the hissing noise of a simple goose.

“Ah! Gilbert!” quoth Walter, putting his hand upon his companion’s shoulder, and looking most comically serious—“those days of liberty are on the wane; thou’rt about to quit the company of bachelors, and —— Alas! who would have thought thou wouldest have been hanged!”

“ Hanged !” ejaculated Gilbert, with a stare of astonishment.

“ Hanged !” repeated Walter—“ Ay, art thou not now on the very point of slipping thy neck into the noose of matrimony—and what’s the difference ? You are both of you led to the halter—a priest officiates—thou say’st thy prayers—and art turned off—and must hang together till you are dead ! dead ! dead !”

Another silent laugh followed this rude stroke of wit, and he to whom it was addressed replied in a half interrogative manner—“ Thou hast never been in love, I’m sure, Walter ?”

“ What, dost thou not remember when I became enamoured of a melon-frame, which I used constantly to visit every night, till the gardener divorced us by virtue of a large hazel stick, which he laid athwart my shoulders. But”—and here he endeavoured to speak in a more serious tone,—“ brace tight the drum of thine ear, for I will catechise thee; now answer me: why dost thou marry ?”

“ To get a wife.”

“ Why, marry, Gilbert, then thou art wrong. At court (I say court, because when a man courts, he should have court authority for courting) they never marry to get a wife, but a maid; for when a courtier requireth a wife, he takes his friend’s, that is a ready made wife; now thou seek’st a ready maid—not a wife. Doth the eye of thine understanding perceive the distinction ? If so, then art thou wrong. Hath she beauty ?”

“ Much.”

“ Then on thy part it will be a needy match, for thou’rt marvellously in want of that commodity. Hath she money ?”

“ No.”

“ Then is she no better than a mistress, for she will be a kept woman when thou espousest her.”

“ But, mother says, marriage will change me.”

“ Marry, then, for thou art sure to be a gainer !”

“ And, besides, she thinks it will fix my wandering disposition.”

“ Doubtless, Gilbert, for thy wife will make thee keep the house as well as herself. Is she industrious ?”

“ Oh, very !” said Gilbert, counting upon his fingers. “ She makes the best black-puddings I ever tasted, and butter, cheese, and preserves, and works well at her needle, and—— ”

“ Enough, enough ! That last qualification is worth all the blood in the black-puddings, the cream in the butter, the milk in the cheese, and the sugar in the preserves ; for, if she be ever so bad, there are at least hopes of her mending, and that thy estate and thy doublet will never be out at elbows.”

“ Then, Walter, thou think’st I may take her to wife ?”

“ Why how long hast thou run alone ?”

“ Mother says I used to twaddle in the eleventh month, and I was twenty last Lammas-day.”

“ Body o’ me, Gilbert, thy mother did let thee run

ere nature could give thee enough calf, though heaven knows she made thee calf enough!"

Gilbert eyed his legs. There was none of that elegant disproportion which is seen in other men's legs, nor were they well turned, but strictly straight. The back of his leg partook almost as much of the shin-bone as the front. After a momentary glance of examination, he raised his head with one of his peculiar smiles, and extending both his rather extraordinary long arms, exclaimed in a bolder tone than usual:—

" My arms are strong enough, though, Walter ! Dost remember when Brown John the Bohemy challenged the 'prentices to throw the quoit in Finsbury Fields ? when they all stood shilly-shally, whispering together, and fumbling their quoits, and staring at the man, who stood like a gamecock crowing over the dunghills, and looking as much as to say, ' Ye dare not try, for ye know I'm the better man.' Did'nt I step forward and offer ; when the fools began to laugh and mow at me, and to cry, ' A gosling ! a gosling ! ' because, forsooth, they were 'shamed at my outstanding ; but when I took off my new girdle and offered to stake it, Brown John took it up, the 'prentices bellowing and roaring like staked bulls ; yet, when they saw John taking long strides to the place where he was to throw from (the further thrower was to be the 'winner'), they ceased their cries and mockery, and stood back, and while John was holding the quoit to his eye with both hands, to measure his distance, they were calm and silent as the great fen under the walls. John aimed

for about half a minute, then away he threw it, whizzing through the air like a bolt from a bow. None of them could have thrown as far by yards; and, seeing me prepare to throw, some of 'em cried out, 'Good Gosling, and hurra!' At this my heart felt joyful, and I was glad, though I was not afraid—no. So I cast my quoit in the air, it skimmed along and fell with a swoop like a jer-falcon, splash into the fen, three ells further than John's. At this the 'prentices danced round me, and hugged me like so many mad devils; the Bohemy gave me back my girdle, but I would not take his just for pride-sake; for I felt more joyful in being a better quoiter, than if I'd gained me fifty girdles. The boys carried me off on their shoulders, treated me with wine, and sent me home merry. Well, I remember by token, that mother buffeted and flouted me till I was almost too deaf to hear her rail at me, and call me sot and tosspot."

In describing this feat of arms, and his victory over the Bohemian, or gypsey as those of his race are now generally called, he appeared to rise superior to that soft, drawling tone of apathy, in which he generally expressed himself. Walter regarded him with a kind of pleasure mingled with astonishment, for he had never during their acquaintance heard him speak at such a length; he could scarcely believe it was Gilbert the Gosling who thus engaged his attention and silenced his rattling tongue, and his fine hazel eyes sparkled with a roguish expression, as he replied:

"By the mass, Gilbert! Thou didst deserve not

only a new girdle, but a new doublet too. But thou mistakest me to think I did mock thy arms, it was only thy supporters, therefore I prithee be not crest-fallen, man! But let us to our converse on thy marriage ; there are two things thou must take good note of; Firstly, when thou'rt wedded thou'l not be so good as half a man!"

" How ? She's a fair wench and witty, and when I 'spouse her we shall be one."

" Truly ! But she being then thy better half, thou must needs be the worse of the twain, and this is the reason. When thou and she are united, thou wilt be divided ; in lieu of making two one, thou wilt be but two halves ; dost take me ?"

" Nay, I muse"—

" Then despair, Gilbert ! an' thou dost not take me who am a plain man. How canst thou hope to take thy love, who is jolly and comely. Nay ! thou must sigh till thy feverish breath wither thy rosebud, and she become plainer than I, ere thou takest her. and now I come to my secondly ; which is—this—now mark me, do not babble of thy marriage to every gossip, for if they cast an eye on thy beardless chin and smock face, they will sport at thy expense, and assert thou marryest for want of hairs, and thou hast better be beardless, than be bearded by those knaves !"

" La ! I would not tell a soul for the world ; but I like thee, Walter !"

He held out his hand to Walter, who took it and shook it kindly ; indeed the Gosling was a great fa-

vourite with him, yet he was so excellent a mark for his irrepressible though unpolished wit, he could not spare him ; his keenest arrows, however, fell blunted and harmless to the ground, thanks to the solidity with which nature had formed the citadel of Gilbert's sense and understanding. Hit or miss it was all one to Walter, who aimed at every thing, sparrow, lark, crow or partridge, he made game of all. If he conceived a joke, he must bring it forth if it cost him his life ; nay, I doubt not but that he would have cracked one with his executioner ; yet his wit made him more friends than enemies, for its source was good humour, and though perchance it sometimes overflowed the boundaries of courtesy, it never damped the mirth of his companions.

“ And though,” continued Gilbert, “ thou dost laugh at me sometimes, I know thou wouldest not hurt me, for thy gibes are always so good-natured and humoursome.—But, I bid thee good day. I'm going to the vineyards in East Smithfield.”

“ Ay, is it so ? Thy love is a wine-dresser then, and no doubt there will be the red blood of a few wine bags spilt on thy marriage ; therefore, Gilbert ! when thy friends present thee with gawds and gifts, I'll not be slinking away, for thou mayst depend on my giving thee—my company !”

“ And I'll welcome thee with all my heart, Walter ! Good day !”

“ Good day ! And remember, if thou wantest any counsel or advice in thy love affairs, I am at thy service.”

Gilbert nodded his thanks and proceeded to the vineyard, leaving Walter to continue his ramble in the forest, which at that period covered the northern neighbourhood of London. The whizzing of an arrow which passed close by him, made him start, and fearing a second from the same unskilful hand, he bawled out: “ Hillio, hillio! o! o! o!” with such a lusty voice, that he made the welkin ring again. In a moment, a man, at about fifty yards from the spot where Walter stood, pushed back the rustling leaves of a thicket and advanced with hasty strides towards him. He was habited in a coarse dark green frock, reaching down to his knees, fastened round his waist with a black leather belt and broad brass buckle; he had tight pantaloons of the same coarse materials; on his feet short loose buff boots, and a close round cap of black cloth on his head, which only in part concealed his fine raven hair, which, in small close locks covered his neck and forehead. He was by no means a tall man, but he carried himself so erect, and walked with such a firm and easy step that he appeared taller than in reality he was; his face, of too dark a brown to be taken for the effect of the sun alone, had once been handsome, but passion or sorrow had traced many a furrow there, and blanched a few hairs in his black head and mustachios, whilst his dark restless eye still retained all its youthful fire and expression.

“ What, Arthur!” exclaimed Walter, laughing when he saw the stranger advancing. “ Didst thou take me for a buck or a butt?”

“ By Saint Erkenwald !” replied the archer, extending his hand to Walter, “ I would sooner have lost this right hand, than have harmed thee ; a squirrel was my aim, but the brush-tailed nut-cracker escaped me. I rarely let fly a shaft in vain, but in future I’ll not shoot so near the walls.”

“ Why, I must confess, ‘tis rather unpleasant to have these arrows whistling past one’s ears ; not that I fear them, Arthur !”

“ Nay, I know thou’rt a lad of mettle.”

“ Yes, forsooth, and thou wouldest have proved me a lad of metal too, by making a mark* of me, and truly I’ve had an arrow escape. Now pray thee solve me — — — ”

The archer looked at this moment so mournfully upon Walter, as the latter waved his hand to crave his silence, that it suddenly cut short the thread of his garrulity, and nearly turned the course of his good humour to sadness.

“ Walter !” said he, sighing, and leaning with both hands on his bow, “ I wish not to repress the lively sallies of thy humour. To those happy as thyself, it is no doubt the very food of mirth ; but to the ear of one, whose heart like mine is the seat of hidden care and sorrow, it sounds most harsh and inharmonious. Sorrow feeds upon itself, and bitter tears are nourishment to grief ; a solemn dirge were sweeter music than a roundelay, and such deep-rooted sor-

* A coin.

row's mine, it nauseates all mirthful sounds. Joy sits as unseemly on me, as a gay vest or jewelled crown upon a skeleton. Since I have dwelt secluded in this forest, I have held converse with no man beside thyself, Walter. To thee I owe all gratitude,—my miserable existence. Oh! how fresh upon my memory glows the picture of that-day!"

"It was a stormy day, indeed."

"Ay, but the storm that raged within my breast was fiercer. The deluging rain poured down in torrents, but could not quench the passion which burned within me; how the thunder rolled in awful peals,—now a low, distant murmuring, and then a dreadful crash, as if the high arch of heaven was falling in upon the earth; the warring elements were in unison with my feelings, and I prayed as the red lightning played around me, and illumined the dreadful havoc of falling branches and trees groaning in the storm; I prayed that the forked lightnings might strike my wretched head and annihilate me. Oh! what mercy was in that blow that struck me senseless to the earth! Thank heaven, for I found a friend in thee!"

"Thank heaven, too!" cried Walter, pulling a green silk purse from the breast of his doublet,—"for when I found thee stretch'd out at thy length by the side o' the stricken tree, like a corse—it was a sore sight—I found this purse, a salve for every sore, lying a few paces from thee, full of coin. I pocketed the cash and carried thee home, promising to bestow the contents on masses for thy soul, for I counted it thy

property; but when thou camest to thyself again, thou wouldest not own it, though I verily believe——well, well; true, thou dost not like the mention o' it. Heaven send such windfalls every day; such foundlings will always find me ready to

“Father them,” he would have added, but Arthur, hearing an approaching footstep, hastily bid him adieu, and in a moment his receding form was concealed in the thick foliage of the forest.

CHAPTER II.

- Twice have the trumpets sounded ;
The generous and gravest citizens
Have hent the gates, and very near upon
The Duke is ent'ring ; therefore hence, away.

Measure for Measure.

Her sight did ravish : but her grace in speech,
Her words yclad with wisdom's majesty,
Makes me, from wondering fall to weeping joys.

King Henry VI., Part II.

AT the period when this history commences, John, surnamed Sans-terre or Lackland, swayed the English sceptre, whose cruelty in putting to death his nephew, the Prince Arthur, and his humiliating and disgraceful concessions to Pope Innocent, affording additional proofs of that cruel and mean disposition which he evinced in his rebellion against his fond and indulgent father and sovereign, and his traitorous endeavour, in conjunction with the King of France, to prolong the captivity of the brave and chivalrous Cœur de Lion, had already rendered him deservedly hated and despised by his barons, who, though generally divided by party feuds, were unanimous in opposing every act of his tyranny ;

and their united power, which was indeed formidable, gave John a tacit intimation of their resolution to defend their rights from all infringement, and shewed him they were prepared bodily to resent any violence or indignity which might be offered them. John, conscious of the power they possessed, as well as of his own unpopularity, endeavoured by flattery and fair promises to attach them to his interest. In lieu of the royal dignity and command, which so well becomes the sovereign, his manner towards his barons at times was cringing, mean and familiar; which, however, had a quite contrary effect to what he desired. For by this outward show of condescension they were fully convinced of the fear he entertained of their strength, and his meanness, instead of conciliating them, only created contempt. The Barons had too many examples of his deceit and duplicity still fresh in their memories, to trust to his kind professions; indeed, they were all well aware that he stood more in need of their services, than they of his; nor was the jealousy and mistrust which he had inspired to be overcome by empty promises and courteous words. If they joined him in his expeditions, and combated on his side, they fought for merry England's sake, and not for any love they bore to John.

Among those who appeared most prominent in opposing the King's oppression was Baron Fitz-Walter, a noble, equally respected by his brother Barons and the citizens of London for his wisdom in council and his undaunted courage in the field; and being Lord of

Castle Baynard, the citizens of London always applied to him for his advice and succour in their difficulties, which they found him ever ready to bestow. The Baron, at this time, had been absent several days on a mission to the King at Brackley, where the court was then held, and his return was hourly and anxiously expected by all the numerous inmates of *Castle Baynard*, but by none more so than his daughter Matilda the fair; and well she merited the cognomen, for in youthful bloom and beauty she far surpassed the fairest ladies of the court, and would have proved a dangerous rival there, had not her father loved her too affectionately to give up so lovely and cherished a flower to be blasted by the insinuating breath of adulation, or to be corrupted by the unlicensed freedom of the royal court. Nor did he ever hear her breathe a wish to that effect; she found all her happiness in the paternal love of the good Baron, whose kindness towards his beloved child was unlimited. He would sit for hours on the terrace on a serene summer evening, listening with fond delight to the soft melting tones of her voice, singing some ballad of a lady's love, or valiant deed of gay cavalier; and strangers passing beneath her father's walls in their boats, would rest upon their oars and listen with mute attention to the enchanting melody. Ofttimes she would accompany these legendary romances with the sound of her harp, which she touched with exquisite taste and execution. Sometimes attended by the careful old Ambrose, whose hairs had whitened in the service of the Baron and his

predecessor, she would mount her palfrey, and amble, curvet, and caracol about the court-yard, sitting her saddle in the most easy and graceful manner, her luxuriant flaxen tresses flowing in natural ringlets over her ivory neck and shoulders, her lovely blue eyes sparkling with delight, and the sweet smiles of her pretty mouth denoting the gaiety of her youthful heart. But since the departure of her father, time had hung heavy on her hands; if she sang it was without delight, for he was not there to praise the measure or the sprightliness of the execution; her harp was out of tune whenever she touched it; nay, she would even have complained of the palfrey being unmanageable, if the fear of wounding the feelings of the groom, to whose charge and management it was intrusted, had not restrained her. For three long days she had impatiently expected to see her dear father, and on the fourth morning was busily employed in completing the embroidery of a silk scarf, which she intended to present to the Baron on his birth-day, when her page, a handsome boy of eleven or twelve years of age, entered the apartment, swinging his velvet cap and plume with a most negligent and easy air, and walked up to his lady.

“ What ails thee, Edward ?” said his fair mistress, “ Why dost thou look so grave this morning ?”

“ Indeed, Lady, I have had enough to make any man look grave !” replied the little fellow in the most serious manner; “ that Jaques, that Frenchman, has had the impudence to insinuate I touched your harp,

and put it out of tune; but an' he had the audacity to say so outright, I should have been tempted to have given him a box of the ear, indeed should I, my Lady!" His panting bosom heaved with rage, as he tossed his curly head with an air of the utmost consequence.

"Why, Edward, Edward! I must confess I am astonished at this burst of passion! Dost thou think it becoming in thee, who art my sworn knight, to shew such anger in my presence? Fie, fie! Go, Edward, and cool thyself upon the terrace; when the river-breeze hath fanned thee awhile, thou may'st be able to approach me in a more respectful manner."

This mandate from his fair mistress, at any other time would have caused a few tears to trickle down his cheeks, but the pride of his little heart forbade it now, so making a low bow he walked off, firmly resolving to be revenged on "that Jaques, that Frenchman," who had so grossly offended his honour, and, of course, was set down as the primary cause of this, the fair Matilda's reproof. He had not, however, long quitted the apartment, ere he hastily returned:

"My Lady," said he—

Matilda lifted her eyes from her work as he spoke, expecting to receive some apology from the penitent page, but he continued:—

"Baron Fitz-Walter approaches the castle!"

At these words the delighted Matilda hastily threw aside the scarf, and desired Edward to send her attendant Maude, that she might prepare to meet her

father as became the daughter of Baron Fitz-Walter.

“Lady!” said Edward, sobbing and kneeling; “forgive me for delaying to obey your commands on the instant, but all in the castle are rejoicing at my Lord’s return, and I shall be the only sorrowful one if you refuse to pardon me. I know I was in fault, but——”

“Nay, Edward; do not endeavour to palliate thy offence. Now my dear father is returned, I cannot remain in anger with any one. There,” said she, smiling and extending her white hand, which the enraptured page kissed respectfully; “I forgive thee, and now thou art my own true knight again. Hie thee quickly to Maude, for it would be unseemly in me, a lack of duty most unpardonable, to let my honoured father wait my welcome.”

Swift as Mercury flew the now delighted Edward to execute her commands.

The vassals were all drawn up in array to receive their lord with due honour; old Ambrose was issuing his orders and every one hastening to his post with that joyful alacrity, which proved their duty a pleasure.

The cavalcade approached amidst the shouts of the citizens and apprentices; the trumpets sounding a grand charge, and the gates of Castle Baynard were thrown wide open to receive the noble owner and his retainers. Six trumpeters wearing tabards bearing Fitz-Walter’s arms, richly embroidered in gold, preceded the Baron; who rode a large iron-grey

charger, and was clad in a complete suit of steel, holding in his right hand a truncheon which was supported on his thigh, and a plain helmet covered his head surmounted by a profusion of blood red horse hair streaming in the wind. He bowed repeatedly to all around him and conversed familiarly with a young knight on his right, who bestrode a beautiful Barbary stallion black and shining as the raven's wing, and curveting and prancing to the music of the hoarse brazen trumpets. His armour was of the finest polished steel studded with golden stars, on his burnished casque he bore a plume of snow white ostrich feathers, and from his neck hung a large golden star pendant from a chain of massive links. Behind this gaily accoutred knight, rode his trusty squire in company with the Baron's, bearing his lance and target; next followed an hundred of Fitz-Walter's train on foot, carrying both long and crossbows, habited in green with black velvet caps adorned with dark green plumes; in the rear of these rode fifty horsemen, armed with spear and target, cuirasses and helms of brass, with flowing manes of horsehair of the colour and fashion of the Baron's; then came the banner of the house of Fitz-Walter flapping in the wind, borne by a gentleman in a suit of shell-armour, riding on a milk white charger with flowing main and tail, guarded by twenty horsemen in coats of mail, and accompanied by six trumpeters; lastly came twenty men, the attendants of the young Knight, in murrey coloured velvet slashed with white satin, walking two and two, armed with crossbows and

short rapiers ; and on a piebald ambling nag, sometimes chatting with one, sometimes with another, rode the lord of misrule, or fool, dressed in the most fantastic style, with a cap and bells jingling most merrily as he threw himself about, now sitting with his face to the tail, and then again like a lady all on one side, accompanying his actions with such ludicrous grimaces that he made some of the company shake their sides with excessive laughter.

The guards in the court saluted in due form as the cavalcade passed, and old Ambrose who filled the important situation of major-domo, descended the stone steps at the entrance of the grand hall, with rather a tottering step and a slight nervous shake of his head, to welcome his dear master ; and added to his inquiry after his welfare :

“ All’s well, my lord !”

“ Thank thee for that, good Ambrose,”—said the Baron dismounting and shaking the ancient domestic by the hand.

The young Knight resigned his fiery steed to the care of his grooms and followed Fitz-Walter to the hall. The words, “ My dear father !”—“ Sweet Matilda !”—struck upon his ear, before he beheld the fair one who uttered them, or to whom the latter affectionate epithet was addressed, and fearful of appearing intrusive in such a scene, he instantly drew back a few paces, and gazed with admiration on the manly figure of Fitz-Walter bending fondly over the symmetrical form of the beauteous Matilda, like a sturdy

oak sheltering beneath the shade of its extended arms some young and tender plant from the rude blasts of yellow Autumn ; his heart beat tumultuously when he saw her press her glowing lips, with the most filial tenderness to those of the Baron. “ What ~~an~~ angel ! ” involuntarily exclaimed the young Knight, unconscious of being heard by the object of his ardent admiration, but she did hear him and turned her inquiring eyes towards him, while her lovely cheeks were crimsoned with blushes.

“ Sir Knight,” said the Baron, to whom Matilda’s recognition had recalled his attention, “ pardon my courtesy in thus neglecting thee, but I am a widower —a father, and this my only child ; let her plead my excuse. Lady Matilda Fitz-Walter,” said he, introducing them to each other, “ Sir Eustace de Mountfort, the son of my honoured friend and companion in arms, the noble Sir Hugh de Mountfort ; whose death thou hast so often heard me lament. He fell bravely fighting under the banners of the renowned *Cœur de Lion*, in the cause of our Holy Mother Church. Heaven rest his soul ! ”

“ Amen ! ” responded Sir Eustace, emphatically, and taking the hand of Matilda, rejoined. “ In grateful remembrance of thy noble father’s friendship to my beloved sire, I’ll break a lance to the honour of his beauteous daughter Matilda the fair ! ”

“ Nay, Sir Eustace,” said the still blushing Matilda, “ spare me these fine speeches, I pray thee ; the compass of my simple language is so limited, that I cannot

make a just return to such gallant discourse. I am no court-bird, Sir Knight, who have learned to repeat my lesson of honey compliment; yet fain would I thou shouldst estimate my welcome to Castle Baynard, not by its simplicity, but by its sincerity!"

" And so true a welcome, fairest Lady," replied the Knight, " would be highly flattering even to one less vain than I am. For myself, I hate the smooth and specious compliment passed current i' the court, and paid indiscriminately to rouge and native bloom, but, alas! 'tis seldom nature blooms there long; for Art, th' inventive jade, steps slyly in, to lend her aid as Nature's help and handmaid, then, by degrees, imperceptibly thrusts her on one side, and straight usurps her place, compliment becomes then acceptable. I've seen a scented courtier make a leg, holding one hand upon his jewell'd hilt, the other nicely poised and moved with just precision to shew a gaudy ring with 'vantage, and heard him bandy sweet-sounding parlace with a wrinkled Duchess, till it had reached the very pinnacle of compliment and cringe and curtsey, and then was fain to hold his tongue for lack of nonsense, and to sink again to noiseless insipidity!"

" St. Mary!" exclaimed Matilda, with astonishment and the greatest simplicity,—" and are all at court like these, Sir Knight, all?"

" Heaven forbid!" replied Sir Eustace. " There are many good and virtuous personages among them still."

Whilst they were thus conversing, Ambrose entered

the hall, to receive Fitz-Walter's commands, who, after giving directions for a banquet to be prepared, addressed himself to the Knight:

“ What, ho! De Mountfort; my Lady daughter designs to feed thee with pretty words I see; but we've ridden hard to-day, and need some more substantial food. They'll serve better for dessert than dinner. So let us uncase and prepare for the banquet, Sir Knight. My love,” turning to his daughter, “ we shall meet anon.”

Sir Eustace de Mountfort took the fair Matilda by the hand, and leading her to the door, made her a courteous bow, and followed the Baron, in order to disencumber himself of his warlike trappings.

Never had valet so much trouble to please his lord as the young knight's; three suits were tried on, and as quickly stripped off again, and thrown aside. Gervis had never experienced so much difficulty in suiting his master's taste before.

“ By the mass! I think this blue and silver not at all becoming, Gervis; what made thee select this?”

“ Really, in truth, Sir Eustace, methinks it looks charmingly well,” answered Gervis, pulling and twitching the doublet to make it sit better, for his patience was almost exhausted. “ It's a charming fit, and all the noble ladies at the court said it was charming, when you wore it the last court-day, and methinks—”

“ Nay, let me have no more of thy charming thoughts, but quickly take out the orange velvet and gold suit which I brought from France.”

The suit was produced, and certainly was a most princely garb, calculated to satisfy the most fastidious taste, being completely covered with exquisite embroidery in flourishes of gold. Sir Eustace was soon attired, and, to the great satisfaction of Gervis, declared himself pleased; a pair of loose, white boots with plain gold spurs and fringes, white gauntlets with the same precious metal wrought in shell-work, and a cap of orange-coloured velvet surmounted by a superb plume, completed the dress of the handsome De Mountfort.

The castle clock struck twelve, when one of the Baron's vassals announced the banquet ready. With courtier-like and graceful ease Sir Eustace entered the spacious hall, where the Baron, Lady Matilda, and the fifty gentlemen who composed the cavalry, were already assembled. When he bowed around, there was a general buzz of admiration. Fitz-Walter came forward, and receiving him in a friendly manner, placed him on his right hand, the fair Matilda sitting on his left. The banquet was splendid; massive chased gold and silver dishes, chalices and flagons decked the board; fine fat haunches, venison pasties, partridges, pheasants, and abundance of every kind of fish, flesh, and fowl, sent forth their savory steams; indeed there was neither lack of food nor appetite. The good Baron and the youthful Knight set an excellent example, which was punctually followed by the obedient gentlemen. The scarecrow hunger soon vanished, the board was cleared, and the wine

beginning to circulate, Lady Matilda arose and retired attended by her pages, much to the regret of Sir Eustace, who had just entered into a very agreeable conversation with her. He had listened to the mellifluous sound of her voice, till its music had charmed his soul, and the brilliancy of her soft blue eyes had wounded his unguarded heart. The festivity was continued to a late hour, but happy was Sir Eustace when he was able to exchange the noisy mirth of the hall, for the enjoyment of his thoughts in the retirement of his own chamber.

CHAPTER III.

Look in and you would swear
 The Babylonian tyrant with a nod
 Had summon'd them to serve his golden god.

Progress of Error.

Hark! how it floats upon the dewy air!
 O what a dying, dying close was there!
 'Tis harmony from yon sequester'd bower,
 Sweet harmony, that soothes the midnight hour!

Ibid.

The suitor's air indeed he soon improves
 * * * * * * * *
 Teaches his eyes a language, and no less
 Refines his speech, and fashions his address.

Retirement.

THE good cheer and entertainment of the vassals was not inferior to that enjoyed in the great hall, and there was as much, or perhaps more obsequiousness and ceremony, bowing and scraping, than among their masters. All the strangers were ushered to the upper end of the festive board with the most pressing civility, Jaques being master of the ceremonies, the suffrages of the vassals having unanimously bestowed on him that honourable office, and good humour and hilarity prevailed throughout. A keen appetite served for sauce,

and every dish was relished with a certain *goût* as the gourmands term it, that some of their betters might have envied. The wine was not spared, and their tongues, which had for a while been silenced by the employment of their jaws, began to wax eloquent, and sallies of enlivening wit—a catch, sung to the tuneful snoring of some fatigued villein—talking of tilts and tournaments where their masters had vanquished knights innumerable, were loudly vaunted and added to their mirth, till the noise increased to such a pitch that it was impossible for the ear to distinguish any distinct words in the general confusion of tongues. At last Jaques, half stunned and out of patience, jumped on the board, and waving his hand for silence, addressed the convivial company in a tone which smacked much of the flavour of good wine.

“ Messieurs — par — pardon — mille excuses — mais — but — you bruit — shake de roof of ma tête — head !”

“ Hark to St. Dennis' Silence !” cried the fool ; “ Mounseer says that you brutes shake the roof of his head.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !” roared the company, clapping their hands, till poor Jaques put both hands to his head, and after a few unavailing “ Messieurs ! Messieurs !” retreated to his seat, satisfied that his endeavours to obtain silence were in vain.

“ A song,” cried the lord of misrule, which the vassals loudly echoed.—“ Come troll us a ballad, and scrape the tune on thy tweedle-dum.”

The good-natured, half-inebriated Monsieur Jaques,

produced his cremona, flourished a little, then with a hem or two commenced :

Quand un homme se marie,
 Quand un homme se marie,
 Qu'elle soit une belle
 Une pucelle
 Fidèle.
 Quand un homme se marie! —

Unfortunately, either the wine had drowned his recollection, or he had actually forgotten the second verse, for he played the tune twice over, but in vain, the music could not recal the words ; so, paying a bad compliment to the understanding of his hearers, he repeated the first, secretly hugging himself on their ignorance in his tongue. He concluded with a fine flourish and as fine a bow, for which he received the most flattering applause, at least, if the loudness of it might be considered as such, although it must be confessed both his vocal and instrumental abilities were far above mediocrity.

“ The Gallic cock crows well, by my fay ! ” quoth the fool ; “ now let’s bark a chorus, my jolly dogs, and then turn into our kennels ! ” — and he began :

O wine ! thou cup of sparkling wine !
 Come fill our hearts with glee ;
 Water to friars we’ll resign,
 Let us be bless’d with thee.

“ Now, boys, roar ! ”

O ! wine, good wine, thou dear delight,
 But one cup more and then—Goodnight, goodnight, goodnight !

Sure music never was so unmusical. The subject of

their song had certainly as much effect upon their ears as upon their eyes, and their words were accompanied with a kind of nasal sleepy sound, that one could have safely thought the wine had also taken them by the noses. Indeed, it had such an effect upon the correct ear of poor Jaques, that he beat a retreat and walked gently off, stepping over the bodies of those who had already fallen beneath the united powers of Bacchus and Morpheus.

Old Ambrose entered, just as they concluded :

“ Boys, why boys !” the usual way in which he addressed the vassals, and indeed he had known the most of them as such, “ Out on ye ! Unruly cubs as ye are. Cease your clatter ; have ye no respect for my Lord Baron, or the Lady Matilda ? Shame on your lewd bawling, ye midnight caterwaulers !”

“ Here’s a shower of pretty words !” exclaimed the fool, “ Hold out your caps, ye midnight caterwaulers, and catch a few drops of this Ambrosial dew, wherewith to whet the wit o’ your understandings, it may serve ye on occasion. Unruly cubs ! Why don’t ye stand bear-headed before the major-domo ? Down, down on your marrowbones, and let him read penitence in your phizzes by the light of his own golden links,” hinting at the chain worn by Ambrose as chief officer of the household.

However they were all too well satisfied and too drowsy for any more sport, and they dropped off one by one, singing in a half murmuring tone “ Goodnight !

Goodnight!" The lights were extinguished, and all was soon hushed in profound silence.

When Sir Eustace retired to his chamber he threw himself sighing upon a couch, so despondingly, that one would have imagined the fair Matilda had already rejected his suit. Heated by the ruby juice of the grape, his ideas flowed fast, yet as it were in one continued round and with such confusing rapidity, they almost overcame his reason. As he lay extending his fine formed limbs on the velvet couch, his thoughts recurred to the banquet and the fair Matilda; how sweetly and how sensibly she had spoken, and yet there was a pride, a cold reserve, or something in her manner, which he could not unravel. He detested the freedom of the ladies of the court, but prudery was worse. No! he banished the thought from his mind in an instant; Matilda could not be a prude. It was the natural modesty of her character, the very charm of her conversation, for she was sprightly without being light, and her gaiety was confined within the strictest bounds of decorum; but then she received the warm, cordial pressure of his hand so coldly, it chilled him, as if the snowy hand he touched, were really snow. " Yet," thought he, and his tongue gave utterance to his reflections: " Fool that I am to wish she should have pressed my hand again; how unbecoming, how immodest would it not have been. The violence of my love, which her incomparable beauty hath inspired, prompts me to think—to wish for those favours,

which, bestowed, I should despise. How inconsistent is this love! Yet why blame love, for what is only the result of my own folly. Love! And shall my heart which till now has beat alone for glory, yield to enervating love? Shall puny love tilt at me with his feather'd shaft and overthrow me? I who have never yet run a single course, without vanquishing my opponent. Oh! fair Matilda, who that hath a heart can look on thee with impunity! Even if to adore thee were a falling off, to fall for one so fair were pardonable. I've sung a sonnet to a lady's eye whose glance ne'er touched my heart, and praised two ruby lips enclosing rows of pearl, and kissed the rosy twain unharmed, and this was gallantry which I mistook for love; but now in truth, I really love, and thy chains, Matilda, hang so lightly on thy slave, that I'd not exchange them for all the joys of liberty." Such were the musings of De Mountfort, his varying resolves and his wavering doubts, nor could all this philosophic reasoning break his chains. Sleep, like a coy maid, fled from the couch of the amorous youth; restless he arose, and throwing open the window, he beheld the dark blue heavens spangled o'er with twinkling stars, and the evening air blew cool and refreshing on his feverish brow. The slow measured footstep of the sentinel pacing the terrace below, was distinctly audible in the silence of the night. Resting his burning head on his arm, he gazed on the celestial prospect above him, and a thousand airy visions reared by fancy, presented him with the most agreeable reflections, but when imagination

gave way to less pleasing reality, he sighed. By the light of the silver lamp which illumined the apartment, he perceived a lyre, which till that moment had escaped his attention; he took it up and running over the chords, played a plaintive air, accompanying it with a fine voice, replete with that refined tenderness and melting pathos which love alone can bestow:

I.

Ye cavaliers with targe and lance,
Who proudly on your coursers prance,
No longer vaunt your arms;
A maiden fair with eyes as bright
As stars, that gem the garb of night,
Excels your glorious deeds of might
By conquering with her charms!

II.

Oh! surer, sharper than a lance
She wounds the heart at ev'ry glance,
And ev'ry knight disarms;
Then sheath the glaive and cast the shield,
Ye valiant knights! ye all must yield,
And bend the knee—when she doth wield
The sceptre of her charms!

As he concluded his ditty, he heard a slight noise like the opening of a window, and fearful of having disturbed or of being overheard by some of the inmates of the castle, he softly closed his own, retiring to his couch not to sleep, but to spend the tedious hours in waking dreams. How little did he imagine, it was the fair Matilda who unclosed the creaking casement which he had heard, for it was indeed Fitz-Walter's

lovely daughter, whose chamber being just above De Mountfort's the sound of the music and his voice had caught her ear, and prompted by that natural curiosity which is inherent in the female breast, she was tempted to listen, but the voice ceased.

"A most timid warbler to be alarmed so easily," thought Matilda, half vexed at having disturbed the minstrel.

She had not closed her eyes the whole night, which she attributed to the noisy revelry of the company. After quitting the hall, Matilda endeavoured to amuse herself with playing on the harp, having first dismissed her pages, with the exception of her favourite Edward, whose vivacity and good humour rendered him a pleasing companion. While she played a sprightly air Edward danced prettily to the measure, capering and pirouetting in a graceful manner, then resting awhile from his exertions, he took a part in her ballads. When his mistress became weary of these amusements, seated at her feet on an embroidered footstool twisting and curling his long locks with his fingers, he asked her carelessly, whether she did not think Sir Eustace de Mountfort was very handsome? At this question so unexpected, Matilda could hardly conceal her confusion as she blushingly replied:

"He is certainly a fine man—he—he dresses well!"

"His dress!—no—I mean his handsome figure and face, my Lady. And then his eyes look so proud and fiery; but perchance you did not remark this, for when he addressed you, Lady, they became so mild and meek,

one could have really supposed he looked at you with different eyes; though I am sure they were not indifferent!"

"Edward!" said Matilda, evidently surprised,— "Upon my word thou must have observed Sir Eustace very narrowly, and yet thy conclusions are incorrect. He is certainly courteous and polite!"

"Ay," rejoined the little rogue, looking up in his Lady's face, "and brave and handsome, too. He is just like Sir Egbert, who became enamoured of the fair Eglantine in the pretty legend you were chanting yesternight:

His nut-brown hair in ringlets hung
Adown his graceful shoulders—

and then his eyes said —"

"Said what?" eagerly demanded Matilda, thrown off her guard by the warmth of Edward's description, but instantly recovering herself, exclaimed pettishly— "Pshaw, Edward, didst thou ever hear eyes speak?"

"No, Lady, but I have seen them, and indeed I read their meaning so well, that, alas!" said he, drawing a deep sigh, "I have done nothing but sigh ever since!"

"And prithee, why shouldst thou sigh? I am convinced they meant no harm to thee, or thou hast misconstrued their meaning, and proved thyself a false interpreter."

"Nay, my Lady, I plainly saw what he intended; heigho!" said he, looking at her sorrowfully.

"And what harm does this cruel Sir Eustace intend, that alarms my valiant knight Sir Edward?"

"He means—that is his eyes—that—" Edward seemed at a loss how to express his meaning, though it was probably fear of giving offence to Lady Matilda which prevented him from being so explicit as he wished, but his boasted power of understanding the language of the eyes being at stake, he was compelled to conclude—"that," continued he, "I do not think I shall be your knight much longer, my Lady!"

These words were sufficient to convince Matilda, the tender glances of Sir Eustace had not escaped the vigilant eye of her favourite; she knew the shrewdness of his observation on all occasions, and the moment he mentioned the young De Mountfort's name, she anticipated the result. Her youthful heart had already confessed him superior to all the knights whom she had ever seen at Castle Baynard. The tenderness of his language; the winning smile that ever played upon his lips; the delight which danced in his fine eyes when he addressed her; the hand which pressed hers so tremulously at parting, were pleasing proofs, even to the innocent Matilda, of the sympathy which existed between them, and that the esteem she felt for him was mutual. Fearful Edward might divulge his ideas as freely to others as he had done to her, she assumed a grave and serious air, saying, though her joyful heart reproved her for her duplicity:

"I shall be earnestly offended with thee, Edward, if I hear thee talk in this strain again. These idle fancies are as unbecoming in thee to utter, as for me

to listen to. But I think no more of it; let not thy tongue prattle of this to Henry or Egbert! Good night!"

"Good night, my Lady!" answered the page, bowing respectfully. "And believe me," said he, with firmness, "I honour my mistress too much to circulate any tale which may offend her ears." Then making another profound bow, he quitted her.

Her own reflections and the conversation which she had with Edward, convinced her of a very agreeable truth; that Sir Eustace de Mountfort regarded her with the purest and most affectionate esteem; a fraternal affection which arose, no doubt, from the knowledge of the friendship which existed between their fathers. These pleasing thoughts prevented her from enjoying her usual rest, and when, in the silence of night, the sounds of music fell agreeably upon her ear, she was exceedingly delighted, and wishing, natural enough, to learn if the serenade was performed by any one she knew, opened her casement, which, as has been seen, disturbed Sir Eustace, and thus left it to her own ingenuity to guess the gallant's name.

The appearance of morning was hailed with feelings of real delight by the restless De Mountfort, and without the aid of his valet Gervis, he exchanged his superb habiliments for the blue and silver suit, and, descending to the great hall, was greeted with a "Good morning!" by Baron Fitz-Walter.

"Thou seest, De Mountfort," said the noble, "when I am absent, there are many disorders and innovations

will creep in among my vassals, notwithstanding the vigilance of my good old Ambrose. Weeds do spring in fairest gardens. I am now going to examine them. Wilt thou accompany me to the court-yard?"

De Mountfort having signified the pleasure it would give him, Fitz-Walter put his arm within the young knight's, and they proceeded to the scrutiny.

Lady Matilda descended soon after, and was met by the fool, who made a very low reverence, so that the bell at the extreme point of his cap, touched the ground.

"Good-morrow to thee, Guy!" said Lady Matilda.

"A good knight to the paragon of beauty, Matilda the fair!" exclaimed the lord of misrule, pompously waving his hand.

"Go to, fool," replied the Lady—"the morning hath just blushed. Wherefore say'st thou good night?"

"If the morning hath but opened one eye," said he, "I will still wish a good knight to Lady Matilda. If, in the wisdom of my folly, I stand on the wrong side of understanding, in wishing thee what every fair lady desires, call me dolt! Oh! happy knight, whom so fair a moon shall shine upon!"

Matilda smiled when she perceived his meaning.

"I've hit! I've hit!" cried he, exultingly. "And now, my Lady, thy knight must not be an every day knight, or the knight of a day, but one who hath tried his steel; but," continued he, shaking his finger prophetically—"beware of a dark knight, for about such an one there lurk a thousand jealousies, ready to rob

thee of thy most innocent pleasures, and be continually stabbing at thy peace. Let thine be a fair knight, for whatever's fair is good, and goodness is excellence!" And away he ran capering to the music of his bells.

"A most reasonable fool!" observed Matilda to Edward, when the appearance of the Baron and Sir Eustace turned her reflections into a more pleasing train. The usual compliments were passed, and during the morning's repast, Sir Eustace enjoyed the delightful conversation of the beautiful Matilda; and by almost imperceptible degrees, became more and more enamoured; a thousand new charms, unseen before, now developed themselves to the enraptured De Mountfort.

A week, a month passed in one delightful round of pleasure, and every succeeding day brought forth new beauties for the admiration of De Mountfort. One morning, when Sir Eustace was listening to the sweet voice of Matilda, the Baron arose, and laying his hand on the knight's shoulder:

"De Mountfort," said he, "I consign thee to the custody and good keeping of my Lady Matilda, for I have affairs of consequence for the ear of the Mayor," (at this time the title of Lord was not attached to that of the chief magistrate of London,) "which demand the earliest attention; therefore, begging thy excuses, I leave thee for a short while."

His excuses were received with the greatest politeness by his guest, and an inward feeling of inexpress-

sible joy at being left alone with the object of his affection; nor was the departure of her father less agreeable to Matilda; and yet, when she found herself alone with Sir Eustace, she felt such a tremor, and her little heart beat so quickly, she almost wished her father back again. Fearful of the young knight's explaining those sentiments, which she nevertheless wished him to entertain, and which every look and action plainly demonstrated *she had inspired him with*, she despatched Edward for her harp, in hopes that thus she might divert his attention. This was an opportunity which Sir Eustace considered favourable, and taking up the silken scarf which Matilda had carelessly thrown on a small marble slab, and to which his eyes had been several times earnestly directed during this discourse, he said :

“ I hope Lady Matilda will not consider it presumptuous in me, if I inquire for what happy knight this elegant favour is intended ? ” at the same time holding it out and displaying its beautiful embroidery. “ Or is it—— ? ”

“ Sir Eustace,” interrupted Matilda, “ I must confess thou hast divined its destination ; and he is so brave a knight,” continued the tormenting beauty, while De Mountfort’s countenance was glowing with confusion, “ that I would not do him so great an injustice to deny it ; it would wrong that pure affection he has always professed for me, and be undeserving the love which I bear him.”

“ The love you bear him ! ” exclaimed De Mountfort

with the greatest surprise mingled with jealousy ; “Indeed, Lady Matilda,—I—I—”

“ Nay, thyself, Sir Eustace, shall confess him deserving of the scarf ;” interrupted Matilda, “ if friendship hath any influence over thee.”

“ Friendship, Lady ?”

“ Ay, friendship. Is not Baron Fitz-Walter, my dear father, thy friend ?”

“ Thank heaven !” ejaculated the knight with fervour, clasping his hands together. He breathed again, and his heart felt as if suddenly relieved from an oppressive weight.

“ Oh ! Lady !” said he, taking Matilda’s hand with the utmost tenderness ; “ I have unguardedly divulged the fond secret of my heart ; indeed, the ardour of my affection is such, it would have rendered it impossible to conceal it much longer, even had it not accidentally escaped me. May I hope ?” continued he earnestly ; “ at least, let me hope, I am not viewed with indifference ?”

“ Indeed, Sir Eustace,” replied the agitated Matilda, “ this declaration is so unexpected—so sudden—I cannot—dare not answer thee ; my dear father, I am sure, will blame my imprudence in listening.”

“ Oh ! say angelic maid !” exclaimed De Mountfort, who interpreted her confusion in his favour ; “ Say, if Baron Fitz-Walter sanctions our—my love—I may hope for a return.”

“ I will obey my father,” answered Matilda, recovering her firmness.

“ And is obedience to his will all I may expect ? ” demanded Sir Eustace ; “ Canst thou be so cruel ? ”

“ I do not think I can find it in my heart to be very, very cruel to Sir Eustace , ” said the darling Matilda, casting down her eyes as if admiring her exquisitely-formed little foot.

The delighted De Mountfort bowed his knee, kissed her hand, and pressed it with unutterable love to his beating heart.

The entrance of Edward with his lady’s harp put a period to this interesting scene.

CHAPTER IV.

What man that lives, and that knows how to live,
Would fail to exhibit at the public shows
A form as splendid as the proudest there?

Couper.

He bade the arrow fly—
The arrow smote the tuneful swain;

Langhorne.

“ **W**ILL I go?—Certes, will I!” said Walter to the mournful Arthur.—“ Why Finsbury fields will be all alive. There will be leaping, wrestling, casting the stone, quoiting, and divers disports to recreate. I would rather fast for a week than lose the show. An’ thou’lt follow me, I’ll warrant thee such merriment as is not to be compared; and, besides, thou canst shoot a good bolt thyself, and the butts are free to all comers, egad! I wish that all butts were as free, I’d fill my horn to a quick tune. Now, prithee Arthur, go?”

“ My melancholy will but sadden the pleasure of thy sportful games, and the cloudiness of my brow will eclipse the sunshine of thine, and wherefore should I go to mar the pleasure of my friend? But if thou dost really think my presence will advantage thee, I will

accompany thee, not for the show, but for friendship's sake!" replied Arthur.

"Bravely said, my boy!" exclaimed the good-natured Walter, rejoiced at having prevailed upon his melancholy companion. "And now for the fields; an' I do not shoot better for thy company, at least my heart will be blither. I' faith thou'l not have time to think or to be sorrowful, for—Why—'foregad," cried Walter, holding his hand to his forehead to keep the light of the sun from his eyes, "if there is'nt the Gosling coming full gallop on a brown mare, as spruce as a May-day!—Holla!—Gilbert!" bawled he, as the youth approached pranked out in the gayest style, with fine new clothes and bows of divers coloured ribands, his long straight hair streaming in the wind, and bearing in his hand a long spear:—"Rein up, rein up!"

"Ah, Walter!" said the Gosling, in a soft tone, and with a stare of stupidity, suddenly reining in his mare, so that her fore feet sprawled out and threw the dust over his friend; I s'pose thou'rt for the fields, by thy decking!" for Walter was likewise dressed in his holyday clothes.

"Didst thou ever know me stay behind on such an occasion?" replied the other, eyeing Gilbert curiously; "But, I say man, what dost thou with that spit, eh?"

"I am going to have a run at the Quintain," said the Gosling, handling his spear.

"St. George defend thee from the sand-bag, Gilbert!" cried Walter, laughing.

"Thou'l see, thou'l see. An' I cannot split a board, no matter; I can cast a quoit. Good bye!" So saying, he stuck his knees into the beast and galloped off, followed by Walter and the Archer.

They soon reached the fields, where an immense concourse of all degrees had assembled, some wrestling, others leaping, running and jumping, with here and there some twenty playing at foot-ball, and groups of elders and sober citizens all in their best and newest garments, who preferred being spectators to joining in the sports. The greatest number of persons were crowded near the Quintain, the running and tilting at which was considered far superior to the rest of the youthful exercises. The Quintain was constructed in the following manner: an upright post was driven firmly in the ground, upon which, in an horizontal position, a strong bar was placed, turning easily upon an iron swivel; to the one end of the bar a board about a foot square was attached, and to the other a bag filled with sand. Walter and Arthur joined this latter group; when just as the candidates were ready to commence, several loud huzzas, and the sound of timbrels struck by twelve young maidens, suspended their sport awhile; and, turning their heads in the direction of the sounds, they beheld a young lady habited in a rich light blue riding dress embroidered with gold, accompanied by two knights, the one young, the other rather advanced in years, whom these merry girls were preceding to the spot where the archer and the other stood. A thousand caps were instantly waving to and

fro, and shouts of “ Long live Baron Fitz-Walter and Matilda the Fair,” rent the air. The assembled multitude made way for the noble trio, and left an ample space for them to view the sports without being incommoded. When they had taken their station, the Baron having signified his wish that they should begin, away rode one of the youths, his spear struck the board, and the revolving bar whirling quickly round, the sand-bag came in contact with his head, and brought him instantly to the ground, to his own discomfiture and the great amusement of all the beholders. Regardless of this event, another youth on a fine black pony next appeared, and riding swiftly forward, struck the board with great force, but suddenly stooping, escaped the threatened blow. “ Bravo, bravo!” resounded from the crowd, Lady Matilda and her friends joining in the plaudits. Several others essayed with inferior success, and the prize was about to be adjudged, when loud cries of “ Make way, make way for Sir Gilbert!” attracted their attention.

“ Who can this famous knight possibly be ?” said De Mountfort, seeing them form a kind of alley for his approach to the Quintain.—“ Didst thou ever hear his name before ?” inquired he of the Baron, who replied in the negative. But his curiosity as to the knight’s quality was soon satisfied, when he saw him advancing attended by half a dozen apprentices, all offering their services. Two of them held his mare by the ears, one supported the end of his spear lest it should fatigue him, another with cap in hand walked by his side with

his hand on the pummel of the saddle, and the two last in equality of pages with most ridiculous pomp, held the extreme end of the mare's long flowing tail; and in this ludicrous manner the Gosling approached the Quintain, amidst the merry jokes of the apprentices. He made one of his best bows to Lady Matilda, who good-humouredly remarked to De Mountfort:—

“A brave knight and a courteous, Sir Eustace! What think'st thou? Will he snatch the laurels from yon stripling's brow?”

“I think, Lady, he seemeth a mere milksop, brought for the diversion of these knaves. An' he win, he will contradict my judgment, so will I fine a mark for the error and the wrong I do his valour. But see, he buckles his baldric tighter; why, one would think he had more need of a steel helm, than a tight baldric.”

“How assured he appears,” said Arthur to Walter, “he is so cool, one would imagine he had already won the prize. Didst thou ever see him tilt before?”

“Never!” replied Walter, “Nor did I expect to see him contend the prize in this manner. By St. Peter if he 'scape without damage to his nonce, I'll call him a riddle—a wizard—who hath learnt to tilt by running at the moonbeams with an oaten straw mounted on his grannam's cat. But now see, how he sticks his heels into the mare's ribs; there he goes,—he flies.—Now Gosling!—Sandbags!—Smack!—He strikes!—Ah!—Wheugh!” whistled Walter; for no sooner had the Gosling struck the board, than stooping to avoid the blow, he slipped from the saddle, and lay sprawling on

the greensward. The disorder of his dress was the only damage sustained by Gilbert; so remounting his beast, and cheered by loud acclamations, he awaited the decision of the judge, or lord of merry disports. The youth with whom Gilbert came to dispute the prize, claimed his right of running again at the Quintain, and the judge awarded him his claim; for Gilbert, if not inferior, had at most only equalled him.

The opponents took their stations; the youth's countenance glowing with animation, as conscious of his own agility he sat firmly in his saddle, Gilbert's opposition only adding to his pleasure, as he expected it would, ultimately, to his honour. The signal was given, he dashed forward, struck the board, passed unharmed, and continuing his course for about fifty yards, turned short round, rode back at a gallop, and struck the Quintain again, while it was still swinging round with the force of the first blow. "Huzza!"— "Bravely Hubert!"—"Hubert's the man!" exclaimed every tongue.

"What think'st thou now, *Lady Matilda?*" said Sir Eustace, "Will Sir Gilbert be *Princeps Juventutis* or no?"

"It is so difficult a question," replied Matilda, "that I leave it to the decision of his own staff."

"The only chance which he hath now," said the Baron, joining in their conversation, "is to break the board; nothing short of that can excel the other."

The bar of the Quintain had ceased its motion, and all eyes were on Gilbert, who grasping his spear, rode

briskly on.—Crack went the board, and instantly one half was flying in the air, and thus decided the contest in his favour: but Gilbert was not to be outdone even in trifles by his opponent, so imitating Hubert, he turned round again, and as he approached the Quintain he threw his spear, then crouching under the bar, he caught it on the other side.

“ Gallantly done!” cried De Mountfort, “ he deserves the prize,” which was awarded him, amidst the warm congratulations of his friends, and Hubert generously shaking him by the hand confessed him his superior.

“ Thou seest, Walter, I 'scaped the sand-bag!” cried Gilbert, addressing his friend, laughing in his usual peculiar manner.

“ Prithee, keep a little distance,” said Walter, holding out his long-bow to keep him off,—“ I must first know whether thou'rt a devil or a man. Swear by St. Paul thou'rt truly Gilbert the Gosling, or I shall think thee a gowk in his shape.”

“ Lord! Walter, thou knowst me well enow.”

“ Nay, swear!” rejoined the other, still keeping him at bow's length.

“ Well, then, by St. Paul, and St. Peter, and St. Benedict, and ——”

“ Hold!” cried Walter,—“ I am as well satisfied with these three, as if thou gav'st me all the saints in the Kalendar. There's my hand, my hearty buck. Now am I certain,” continued he, lowering his voice and whispering in the Gosling's ear, “ that it is love

which hath inspired thee with valour, strength, and agility; by the same reason a priest decks the horns of a ram with posies, to make him a more acceptable sacrifice. But is not thy mistress among these damsels, ay, Gilbert? An' she be, show her to me. Is she fair, I'll give her my blessing; is she ugly, I'll give her a blessing too, needing something to make her marketable."

"That's she," said Gilbert, pointing with his spear; "that's Marian,—that fat little girl, with the yellow crockets."

"Yellow, quotha! They're red, man. Red hair, by St. Anthony!" exclaimed Walter, bantering.

She was, however, a very modest looking little maiden, with long yellow locks, or "crockets," and plump rosy cheeks; and not fat, as Gilbert expressed it, but merely *embonpoint*.

Sir Eustace rode to the spot where they were conversing, and beckoning to Gilbert presented him with a mark, complimenting him on his victory, which highly gratified the Gosling, who made the Knight a very low reverence. As Sir Eustace turned his Barbary to return to his party, he perceived a stone hurled by some one in the crowd, accidentally strike Matilda's palfrey, which so startled the spirited animal, that it instantly sprang forward, while the old Baron hallooed lustily:—

"Give him rein, daughter! Hold fast by the pummel of the saddle! Let him go, and fear nought;"

still keeping his position apparently fearless of any danger happening to his daughter.

“Good God!” exclaimed De Mountfort, spurring on his steed in pursuit, “the animal flies so fast, she will certainly lose her seat.”

“There’s no fear,” cried the Baron, but unheeded by Sir Eustace, who was following the mistress of his heart greatly alarmed, expecting every moment to see her thrown.

“In a large field, with a strong rein, a good rider hath nothing to fear;” continued Fitz-Walter, placing every dependance upon the equestrian skill of his daughter.

As the palfrey approached the spot where the archers were shooting, the animal turned suddenly to cross it. Arthur was just drawing an arrow. De Mountfort saw the imminent danger of his beloved, and driving his spurs into his horse’s sides, plunged forward and received the fatal shaft in his shoulder. The archers were all thrown into confusion at this event, for they were so intent upon their amusement, they had not observed the approach of Matilda or the Knight. But how much were they surprised, when they saw the brave Sir Eustace still continuing his career, unheedful of the arrow, which was sticking in the fleshy part of his shoulder; he overtook Matilda, and stooping as he galloped side by side, seized the rein of her palfrey, and with a firm hand arrested the progress of the frightened animal. The Baron, who

had seen the accident, and witnessed the preservation of his dear Matilda by the intervention of Sir Eustace, came up, with Arthur, Walter, Gilbert, and the whole troop of archers at his heels.

“By the holy rood, Sir Eustace! ‘t was bravely done,” said the Baron; “but dismount, my dear friend, I fear me thou’rt wounded severely I do believe.”

“Wounded!” shrieked the gentle Matilda, her lovely cheeks turning deadly pale as she beheld the arrow yet infix'd in the shoulder of the Knight.

“Do not be alarmed, Lady,” said De Mountfort eagerly, “‘t is a trifle not worthy thy fears.”

“Twas I shot the unlucky shaft, Sir Knight, and though accident directed it, I am sorely grieved, believe me. If thou wilt dismount, I will extract it presently, fortunately it is not barbed, and therefore less danger is to be dreaded from the wound.”

De Mountfort dismounted, and submitted to the hand of Arthur, who quickly drew the arrow from the wound, while tears filled the eyes of Matilda at sight of the blood which followed it.

“Wilt thou take this ‘kerchief, good Sir!” said Matilda, offering her own to Arthur, “to keep the cold air from the wound.”

Arthur bowed, and took the handkerchief from her hand, and bound up the arm.

“Thank thee, archer!” cried De Mountfort, shaking Arthur kindly by the hand, whose looks plainly ex-

pressed the sorrow he felt at the misfortune ; then offering the trembling Matilda, who had dismounted, one arm, walked towards the city accompanied by Fitz-Walter, who could not find words sufficiently grateful to express his acknowledgments to Sir Eu-stace, to whom the exquisite tenderness and concern evinced by Matilda, gave infinitely more pleasure than it was possible for the pain of the wound to im-bitter.

“ Walter ! ” said Arthur, “ I must bid thee adieu ; this accident hath completely chilled what little ardour I possessed. I leave the field open to thee, and I know too well thy skill in archery to doubt thou wilt carry the prize. I ’ll to the forest again, and leave the pastimes and disports to those more light of heart than I am. There ’s a mournful pleasure in solitude that suits my melancholy ; yet there was a time, Walter, when with a heart beating high with youthful expecta-tion and a desire of honour, I sought the field,—when I disdained the greensward as too base for my haughty footsteps, and carried my plumed head so high I thought all men beneath me. The fiery steed flew not so swift but my desires outstripped him, and in the fierce contested course I could have bounded from his back, and with the fleetness of a deer have mocked his tardy strides. My ambition knew no bounds ; when men praised me, I considered their eulogy a cloak to hide their envy. Such pride merited chastisement ! It came ; my heart felt the stroke ; my buoyant spirits sunk beneath the oppressive burden of my woes.—But

let me not imbitter thy pleasure by a recital of my sorrows ; for oh ! 'tis my curse to infect others with my grief. · Fare thee well, Walter !”

“ Fare thee well, Arthur, an'it must be so,” replied Walter looking after him with regret, and muttering to himself ;—“ but I'll be shot an' I let fly another fletch. Now would I give my best bow to any one who will solve me this riddle of a man. He moans and groans and infects the air with sorrowful sadness, so that one cannot breathe within bow-shot of him but one draws in a mouthful of grief. The very dryness of his dolor whets my curiosity. I'll follow to the forest, and come upon him as it were unintended, and sooth him with converse in as dolorous a key as I can tune my pipe to.” And the good-natured Walter went forthwith to put his benevolent intention into execution, leaving behind him sports and merry makings, in which he was fitted by his skill and natural flow of spirits to become a leader.

The instant they arrived at Castle Baynard, Baron Fitz-Walter despatched one of the vassals for a famous French chirurgeon who lived hard by the castle, and who soon made his appearance. Having probed the wound, he shook his head, and dressed it ; the Baron, who had anxiously watched every sign and gesticulation of this son of Esculapius, eagerly demanded if there was any imminent danger to be feared. He replied, there was no dangerous symptom at present, and wisely remarked, that if the wound had been a little deeper, and inflicted with a barbed arrow, it

would have been much more serious ; but now, unless mortification ensued, there was not the least doubt of a speedy recovery, for the plaster he applied had performed the most miraculous cures. He took his fee, and completely bowed out of the apartment, leaving the Baron alone with Sir Eustace, who relieved his uneasiness by assuring him, he felt but a slight inconvenience from the wound. Scarcely had the chirurgeon departed, when Edward entered with kind inquiries from the Lady Matilda.

“ Tell thy fair mistress, page, I find myself so well,” replied Sir Eustace, “ that, with her permission, I will attend her.”

The page bowed and retired, but in a few minutes returned again, announcing his Lady. De Mountfort arose from his couch, and advanced to meet her.

“ Lady !” said he, “ for this kindness receive my grateful acknowledgment ; although it were both my duty and my pleasure to wait upon thee ”

“ Nay, Sir Eustace ! thou art now an invalid, suffering for my sake, and gratitude bids me o’erlook those punctilious forms which ceremony demands ; thou’rt a fitter subject for a couch and a soothing nurse, than for the sport of a lady’s fantasies.”

Sir Eustace bowed his thanks, as he tenderly pressed the fair speaker’s hand.

“ Right well, sweet daughter !” said the affectionate Fitz-Walter, “ I hoped no less from thee ; thou’rt thy father’s own. Come, kiss me, wench !”

Matilda’s lovely cheeks glowed deeply as she kissed

her father, nor dared her eyes meet those of De Mountfort.

“ My eyes are very weak of late,” continued the Baron, wiping away the joyful tears, which overflowed in the gladness of his heart ; “ And now look thou to our mutual friend. Amuse him with the prattle of thy tongue, for woman’s speech is cheering to the sick man’s heart ; her balmy breath dissipates a thousand cares that sickness breeds ; her watchful eye interprets all his wants ere his languid speech can give them utterance. ’Tis not the medicine alone that works the cure, but the kind hand that ministers the draught ; which is indeed, a sweetener to its bitterness. Had not Sir Eustace bravely shielded thee with his body, perchance I should not now have thus infolded thee in my arms.”

“ My good Lord !” cried Sir Eustace, “ thy kindness overrates my worth. ’Tis true, I interposed my body ’twixt thy fair daughter and the archer ; but who, the meanest of thy villeins, would have flinched from danger fifty-fold to have preserved from harm his beloved mistress ? And sure what duty would have prompted, love may do ! Pardon me, my Lord ; nor be offended that I mention love.”

Matilda, who was seated by her father, his arm fondly encircling her slender waist, concealed her face by leaning on his shoulder, and throwing her arm affectionately round his neck.

“ I cannot conceal it,” continued De Mountfort, “ thy fair daughter’s eyes have wounded deeper than

the arrow; and so do I pray that death may freeze up the current of my life, if I must sue in vain for thy approval of my suit."

As he spoke, a smile played upon the lip of Fitz-Walter, which was a herald of joy to the love-sick De Mountfort.

"For thy father's sake, De Mountfort," replied the Baron, "I should have loved thee, wert thou other than thou art; but being brave and noble, as I know thee, I do love thee for thyself, and the declaration of thy love for Matilda is welcome to my heart. If thou canst prevail upon my daughter to smile upon thee, I shall be proud to call thee son."

Sir Eustace took the Baron's hand and pressed it to his heart, his grateful looks eloquently expressing the happiness he experienced.

"Come, hold up thy head, pretty one!" said the Baron, raising his daughter's head, exclaiming:—"Tears! by the mass! Weeping for the mischief she hath done. Or do these tears flow to drown the burning blushes in thy maiden cheeks?"

"Say, dear Matilda!" said De Mountfort, "are these pearly drops harbingers of joy or sorrow to thy Knight?"

"I would not willingly give sorrow to any one, Sir Eustace," replied she, "and if my eyes do speak ought but joy to thee, they do belie my heart. So, as my father bids, there is my hand." De Mountfort took her offered hand and kissed it.—"If I wept, Sir Eustace, 'twas because my heart was filled with such

contention twixt modesty and esteem, that my eyes o'erflowed to think my tongue was denied the utterance of my thoughts ; but obedience to my dear father, and gratitude to thee, have now vanquished all my scruples !”

Fitz-Walter embraced the sweet Matilda and his young friend De Mountfort, and left them together, exceedingly pleased with the prospect of such an union, which he had, indeed, anticipated when he invited the gallant son of his old friend to Castle Baynard.

CHAPTER V.

Stand back, here comes royalty.

Battle of Hexham.

I am the King: for so it stands in the comparison :
Thou the beggar : for so witnesseth thy loveliness.
Shall I command thy love ? I may : shall I enforce
Thy love ? I could : shall I entreat thy love ?
I will.—

Love's Labour Lost.

ONE morning, as Baron Fitz-Walter was listening with delight to the silver tones of his daughter's voice, and the happy De Mountfort was hanging fondly over the choice of his heart, gazing on her countenance which beamed with sweet intelligence and beauty, they were interrupted by the entrance of a domestic.

“ Pardon me, my Lord !” said the vassal, observing evident marks of astonishment in his master's countenance at his unbidden intrusion, “ a herald from the King would speak with you, on the instant.”

“ I' the King's name, then, Jasper,” replied the Baron, “ do thou bid him here. My children,” continued he, “ excuse me for a while, they may be affairs of private

note this royal herald's charged withal ; but when I have despatched this business, I shall be rejoiced to see ye."

Sir Eustace, whose wound was completely healed, took the arm of the sprightly Matilda and drawing it within his own, left the Baron to negotiate with the King's messenger, who was immediately ushered into Fitz-Walter's presence. He advanced about midway and having bowed, rested his silver trumpet on his hip, and raising one hand a little, he remained motionless as a statue, the moving of his lips being only visible, and thus he delivered his errand :

" King John, to Baron Fitz-Walter greeting : Whereas on $\frac{y}{e}$ morrow at noon, his Grace having occasion to pass thorough $\frac{y}{e}$ City of London, it is his royal pleasure to sojourne at Castle Baynard, with one hundred of his true knights. God save the King !"

Having thus proclaimed the King's commands, the herald remained silently awaiting the Baron's reply.

" A hearty welcome to England's King !" said he ; " In strict obedience to his mandate, I will instantly prepare for the reception of his royal person, and his one hundred liegemen. So bear my duteous answer to my sovereign."

The Baron waved his hand as he concluded ; the herald bowed and departed.

Orders were immediately issued for the royal entertainment ; all the choicest delicacies which could be procured in the City of London were provided by Ambrose, who was never so happy as when employed

in the superintendence of a feast, of which his excellent abilities, his correct judgment and approved taste, rendered him very capable. The grand hall was hung with rich crimson cloth with fringes of gold, and large festoons tastefully arranged, supported by the arms of Fitz-Walter. At the upper end a splendid throne was erected, raised by several steps above the floor, covered with crimson velvet, and fringes to correspond with the hangings; the canopy was surmounted by the royal arms richly emblazoned; the steps were covered with cloth of gold, and the King's chair was richly gilt and burnished, the seat and back of which being covered with white velvet. The hall had never been so gaily decked before, and old Ambrose rubbed his hands in ecstasy as he gazed on the wonderful transformation. In every department the preparations proceeded with celerity and despatch.

After he had put the whole machinery of his household in motion, Fitz-Walter returned to inform Sir Eustace and his daughter of the honour intended him by King John.

“ Our sovereign hath just apprized me by his herald that on the morrow he will honour Castle Baynard with his presence,” said the Baron.

“ Indeed !” exclaimed De Mountfort. “ What urgent business brings his Grace in such haste from Brackley ?”

Matilda's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the mention of the royal visit, for she had never seen the King, and wished to satisfy her curiosity without all the formality of presentation at court, which would

have been rather painful than gratifying to her feelings.

“ I know not the motives of his coming hither,” said Fitz-Walter, in reply to Sir Eustace’s question, “ perchance to raise a few hundred marks from among his dear, good citizens, to be lost in some petty quarrel with French Philip ; albeit, I should not marvel much an’ they deny him. He hath demanded so often, and been obeyed so readily, he imagines their means are inexhaustible, and as unbounded as his wants ; but whatever his intentions may be, I will receive him, Sir Eustace, as it becomes an Englishman and one of his nobles. I have sworn fealty to him ; he is my King, and till his actions prove him unworthy of that title, I’ll serve him, ay, to the death ! My daughter, deck thy face in sweetest smiles to meet thy sovereign, how proud my heart will be to hear thee extolled in royal speech !”

“ They say that courtiers have such honey tongues, they turn one’s head,” said Matilda gaily ; “ and if the King, who is their superior, should deign to praise, why, dear father, what will become of me ?”

“ Thou hast too little vanity, my dear Matilda,” said Sir Eustace, “ to fear the power of flattery ; notwithstanding, I shall feel a little jealous, I am afraid, when I see thee bestow a smile even upon my King, lest —— ”

“ Why, Eustace !” interrupted Matilda, laughing at his earnestness, “ in good sooth, I believe thou art jealous already,” and taking his hand, she put the

other fondly on his shoulder, and looking up in his face with a playful smile dimpling her cheeks, continued : “ Thou knowest, Eustace, my heart confesses thee my only sovereign.”

“ And, beshrew my heart ! ” cried De Mountfort, saluting her pouting lips, “ if ever I be jealous of thee.”

Thus these happy lovers conversed, while Fitz-Walter’s heart, glowing with parental affection, confessed them formed for each other.

All night the greatest part of the vassals were engaged in their various occupations, and not till a late hour the following morning was their work completed. As the hour of noon approached, expectation was raised to the highest pitch, yet the castle clock struck one and there was not the least sign of the King’s approach. At length the sound of martial music, which became louder and louder every instant, made their hearts beat high, and the shouts of the populace foretold the proximity of the royal visitor.

In a few minutes John, with an hundred knights and their attendants, were entering the gates of Castle Baynard. The King, dressed in a plain suit of armour, with his vizer up, bestrode a handsome coal black war-horse, led by two equerries in crimson and gold ; the knights were similarly clad to the King, with the exception of a gold coronet which encircled the helm of their sovereign. The Baron, Sir Eustace, and fifty gentlemen of Fitz-Walter’s train, superbly dressed, received the King at the entrance of the grand hall.

“ Long live King John ! ” cried the Baron and Sir

Eustace, and the vassals loudly echoed their master's greetings. The King bowed graciously.

"Your Grace is welcome," continued the Baron, "and proud I feel to welcome my liege Lord to Castle Baynard!"

"Good Fitz!" replied John familiarly, smiling and taking him by the hand, "accept our hearty thanks for this true welcome. We know thy worth and loyalty, and therefore did repose in thee the care of our entertainment during our sojournment here."

"And for this high honour, much I thank your Grace," replied the Baron.

The King turned to the young Knight,—

"Sir Eustace de Mountfort!" said he courteously, "it doth enhance our pleasure to see thee here."

"Your Grace's kindness is too great!" replied De Mountfort; "my heart's too full, to thank your Grace for a such a compliment."

"N'importe, Sir Knight! Every liegeman's tongue is in his scabbard; and thine, ere this, has whispered in the ears of our foes, and spoke home to many a heart; so truly, too, they have laid them down to rest quite satisfied with the force of thy argument."

Sir Eustace bowed, and John, attended by the Baron and several of his followers, retired to robe for the banquet; De Mountfort remaining behind to receive the knights, with most of whom he was well acquainted.

The King observed to Fitz-Walter, as they proceeded to the apartment:—

“Sir Eustace is a valiant knight; our brother Dickon loved his father well—a brave soldier, and the son is worthy such a noble sire.”

“He is, indeed, my liege!” replied the Baron; “his father and I were sworn brothers, and bitter was the day that rob'b'd me of such a friend; noble, generous, and brave, and withal so good a master, that the meanest thrall in his service did love him, and this love hath descended to his gallant son, the ‘eir to all his fortunes and his virtues.’”

The knights were soon attired and waiting in the hall; the variety and richness of their habits added greatly to the brilliancy of the scene. Fancy appeared to have been exhausted in the form and fashion of their garments, and Iris stripped of every colour for their adornment; and the waving of plumes, as they paced the hall, seemed from the galleries like the white foam of the stormy ocean.

To the inspiring strains of martial music, the portals were thrown open, and King John approached, supported on his right hand by the Baron, the knights forming two lines the whole length of the hall. The King's dress was entirely of white satin embroidered with silver, a gorgeous star blazing on his breast; his shoes were also of white satin, in which shone large rosettes of brilliants; and his crown, of the most exquisite and rare workmanship, was adorned with precious stones. Six pages in crimson and gold supported a long train of rich purple velvet, lined and bordered with ermine. Twelve of Fitz-Walter's

attendants followed the pages, and drew off, six on each side of the throne ; they wore silver casques of Grecian form, with polished cuirasses of the same costly metal, and blue velvet habits or petticoats reaching to their knees, their legs and arms bare, and sandals of gilt leather ornamenting their feet.

As soon as the King was seated, Sir Eustace, in an elegant suit of rose-coloured silk, spangled with stars of polished gold, led Matilda the Fair into the royal presence. She wore a flowing robe of pearl-white satin supported by three pages, a zone of brilliants encircled her taper waist, and a yellow silk net sprinkled with small diamonds covered her head, from which were pendant two small rich gold tassels, these, falling from behind her ears, nearly reached her snowy and undulating bosom, which plainly evinced her agitation. The King's fine dark eyes sparkled with pleasure as he gazed on the angelic form of Matilda, and he scarcely breathed, so intense were the feelings of admiration she had excited in his breast. When the Baron introduced her to him as his beloved and only daughter, he experienced scarce less tremor than Matilda, and taking her gently by the hand, he courteously saluted her burning cheek.

“ By my halidome ! thy daughter is a most celestial maid, good Fitz ! ” exclaimed John in a rapture, while De Mountfort watched the kindling fire of his sparkling eye, and heard the ardour of his speech with jealous pain.

“ Wherefore hast thou let this lovely flower bloom

unseen within the confines of the city walls? She would be the very ornament of our court!"

" My daughter is a mere girl, your Grace, too young to appear in public; and I hope your Grace will pardon a father's fondness in bringing her thus early to your royal notice," replied Fitz-Walter, observing the warmth with which John praised Lady Matilda's charms.

After a few more compliments and courteous ceremony passed between the royal guest and his entertainer, they all seated themselves at the hospitable board and partook of the good and abundant cheer placed before them. Fitz-Walter was placed on the right, and Sir Eustace and Matilda opposite the King.

" In our judgment," observed the King, looking significantly at De Mountfort and Matilda, who were earnestly conversing together, " Sir Eustace doth not consider thy daughter too young for love. How softly he breathes his warm language in her ear, while his languishing eyes bear testimony to the sincerity of his tongue. Hast thou no fear of this gallant carrying off thy pet lamb, Fitz, ey ?"

" I fear it not, my liege, but hope he may!" replied the Baron.

" Soh !" exclaimed the King, evidently surprised at this intelligence, but instantly recovering himself, demanded with a composed and unruffled countenance; " then De Mountfort hath thy consent to woo the Lady Matilda. Is 't so ?"

“ In remembrance of the friendship which existed between Sir Hugh de Mountfort and myself, and for his own worth, your Grace, I have consented to receive him as my son.”

“ And by our troth!” exclaimed John, with well-feigned sincerity, “ they are a noble couple; a pretty pair of turtles; a pair well paired and not to be compared! It argues well the sincerity of thy amity to the father, to bestow thy choicest jewel, thy heart’s best treasure, on the son. Oh! ’tis a grateful sight to see love springing thus from true friendship. Happy the man who can say, ‘ I have such a friend!’ ”

“ These gracious words, my liege, do feast mine ears and joy my heart,” said the delighted Fitz-Walter, pleased at the apparent candour of the King; “ to know your Grace approves my choice, renders me proud and happy.”

“ Henceforth, good Fitz!” continued John, “ it shall be our care to push De Mountfort’s fortunes; we did affect him well ere this, but knowing now he hath the countenance of our loyal and loving Baron, we hereafter will extend our hand and put him in the road to fortune.”

“ Oh! your Grace, such kindness, backed by such fair promises,” cried the good and unsuspecting Fitz-Walter, “ claims my warmest gratitude; nor is it false pride that prompts my heart to say: ‘ De Mountfort’s loyalty to his sovereign shall merit his royal favour.’ ’Tis a bold assertion; but, for the sake of its verity, my liege, excuse it.”

The Baron thought this hour the most delightful of his life, and to hear the King sound the praises of his favourite, overwhelmed him with the most exquisite feelings of delight. But the suavity of his royal visitor, his high promises and deluding smiles, were only a mask worn by John to conceal the base design which he harboured in his breast. The dazzling charms of Matilda had subdued his heart, and as he looked upon the beauteous girl smiling so winningly on De Mountfort, he wished his jealous glance had power to annihilate the lover; but he was too wily and cautious openly to express his sentiments; and, by his artful and insinuating discourse, completely erased from Fitz-Walter's mind any unfavourable impression which his unguarded expressions of admiration might have previously caused.

The gold and silver goblets were filled with sparkling wine, and Baron Fitz-Walter arose and drank to the health of the King. Every tongue pronounced, and the hall rang with "Long live the King." John put his hand to his heart, and bowing to all, thanked them, and pledged the Baron.

When it was time for Matilda to retire, she arose, and curtseying with downcast eyes to the King and the assembled company, who all uncovered and stood up, was escorted to the portal by Sir Eustace de Mountfort, who, on his return, received numerous friendly congratulations from his intimates on his felicity in being the favoured knight of one so fair.

Not even exhilarating wine could supply the loss of

pleasure occasioned by Matilda's absence to the enamoured John; and disguise, from long continuance, becoming painful to him, and fearing his turbulent spirit, excited by wine, might suddenly instigate him to throw aside the mask, he quitted the festive party at an early hour, leaving the Baron and De Mountfort charmed with his courtesy and good humour.

Left to his repose by his attendants, and unrestrained by observation, John gave a loose to those reflections which desire gave birth to. Sitting upright in his splendid bed, he fixed his eyes steadfastly on the rich tapestry which adorned his chamber, and murmured:—

“ Am I the King?—The sovereign ruler of these people?—Ay, 'tis even so; the highest noble and the meanest thrall are equally my subjects. Fitz-Walter is rich and noble, and his daughter fair.—Oh! how fair! Yet am I their master, and may command them,—yes,—Matilda will—she shall be mine! What heaven to press that angelic form, to fold her fondly in these—Ah! but then that simpering love-sick swain De Mountfort.—Psha! a mere boy! I'll tempt him with the bauble glory, and send him to the field to reap a laurel harvest; and, perchance, his valorous spirit may lead him on to death,—a glorious death! Or make him my favourite elect, and then his best friends will soon discover he 's a traitor; nay, an' he were to tag his sentences with ‘ Long live the King,’ their envy would interpret it high treason; and they

would never rest, true loyal subjects ! till they saw his headless trunk upon the scaffold. But why should I sow when I would reap ? These means are too tardy for so fierce a flame as mine ! Yes, it shall be so.— I will despatch this knight upon some mission ; I might be stung in plucking the flower while this busy bee is humming round and sips the honey of her lips. When he's away, I'll tear the rose perforce from off the parent stem and place it in my bosom. But conscience cries, ‘ The thorns ! Beware ! the thorns may prick ! ’ What then ? Our coffers are not empty, and our good Papa will give us absolution. Yet, methinks, this same absolution was invented by Satan as a salve for the sores of all tender consciences, till often used it sears it, numbs all sense of evil, and thus the devil hires man to sin. Life itself is but a dream, and when we wake all our drowsy visions pass away. Sleeping, we oft behold our enemies within our poignard's reach, and strike—and see the crimson torrent of life rush gurgling forth ; and when we trembling awake, our pores distilling big drops of perspiration, hold out our unspotted hands and cry, ‘ ‘Twas but a dream ! ’ and at the approach of day our fears do vanish. Such is life ! or if it be not, befall what may, Matilda must be mine ! ’

And he threw himself down again in his bed, devising in his mind some plausible excuse to send away Sir Eustace de Mountfort ; for the jealous eye of a lover, he well knew, would watch every glance, word,

and action of a rival. He knew the ardent spirit of De Mountfort, and foresaw he would readily seize any opportunity to signalize himself, and cunningly inferred from his thirst for glory, that even would yield to the call of honour.

CHAPTER VI.

And my love's cheeks, half seen, half hid,
With love and joy blush'd deeply red :
Short was our time and chaste our bliss,
A whisper'd vow and a gentle kiss ;—

Allan Cunningham.

“DRAW forth thy poignard, namesake, and let us swear eternal friendship!” said one of the King’s pages, a handsome youth about the same age and complexion to Edward, with whom he had become particularly gracious and communicative ; and, indeed, the similarity of their dispositions and pursuits had already united their young hearts in the bonds of friendship. They drew forth their glittering daggers, and crossing their short blades, vowed amity to each other, then sheathing their weapons, tenderly embraced.

“And now, my dear fellow,” said the King’s page, “we must keep each other’s secrets and never divulge any thing that passes between ourselves. Let me see, how old art thou ?”

“Just twelve years and eleven months,” replied Edward.

“ Why, then,” rejoined the other, holding up his head, “ I believe I have the advantage of thee, Ned, by two whole months. I suppose now thou hast many pretty little misses about the city to whom thou dost chant thy ballads ?”

“ Misses ? Oh, no !” exclaimed Edward, “ I am too young to think of the ladies yet.”

“ Too young !” cried the other, emphatically, “ too young ! Why, man, I have known half a dozen pretty girls for this twelvemonth past. I must confess I’m a sad rake. Dost know, Ned, I never pass Laloze’s, the confectioner’s, but I go in and gossip with his daughter Alice. She is the most charming little creature ! And then, Ned, I kiss her, and kiss her, till her cheeks are as red as her lips.”

“ How happy thou must be !” exclaimed his friend, at this lively picture of his amorous pursuits ; “ but prithee tell me of the other five.”

“ There’s Ellen, and Jane, and——But I will introduce thee when thou comest to Brackley, and thou shalt have the choice of the five ; Alice of course, is my princess—her father makes the best currant-jelly I ever tasted ;” said he, smacking his lips ; “ but when thou seest her, take care thy heart doth not rebel against me.”

“ Have we not sworn friendship ?”

“ True, my dear fellow !” replied the other, feeling the rebuke ; “ remember, to-night we meet again, adieu !” and having embraced, they parted.

“ Out o’the way, fool!” cried Edward to Guy, as he was hastening to his Lady.

“ Cock-a-doodle-doo!” exclaimed the fool; “ my heart! how the young cock crows ere his spurs have come. Now, an’ thou couldst command good sense, as easily as thou dost folly, thou wouldst be a very wise man. Art thou or I master here?”

“ I—I—certes!” said Edward.

“ I will shew thee the error of thy conclusion. To commence, thou art a tail-bearer, which is mean. Now I never bear any body’s tail but my own; therefore am I thy better. Secondly, thou art only a single page in the ‘book of life,’ but folly may be read in every chapter of human life; therefore am I greater.”

“ A fool’s argument!” said Edward.

“ Then heaven send thee a little folly to understand it,” quoth the fool; “ take my advice, carry not thy head so high; for folks seeing thee bear it so lightly, will fancy there’s but little in it:—

All philosophers stoop the head,
Some bowed with wisdom, some—with lead.

Think o’that, an’ thou wouldst appear wise, and in future never set thy wit against my folly, for an’ thou gains’t the victory, thou’lt lose; for I always bear the bell!” and he pointed to his cap, and ran off.

“ Edward!” said Lady Matilda to her page, when he entered her apartment, “ hast thou seen Sir Eustace this morn?”

“ He left the castle at break of day, my Lady,”

replied Edward, “ in company with the King and my Lord your father, and they have not yet returned.”

“ And didst thou see Sir Eustace ?” inquired Matilda.

“ Yes, my Lady, but he said nothing. Indeed his Grace was speaking to me, when Sir Eustace mounted his horse, and therefore he had no opportunity.”

“ And what said the King ?”

“ His Grace said : ‘ Commend me to thy fair Lady, and present to her my little Carlo, which my groom will give thee.’ It is a beautiful creature, my Lady ; but I will bring it to thy feet.”

He went, and soon returned, leading by a gold chain a very small milk-white Italian greyhound, with a collar of the same metal.

“ Come, Carlo ! My pretty Carlo !” said Edward, patting the hound ; “ Is it not a pretty one, my Lady ?”

“ Oh ! charming, indeed !” exclaimed Matilda, delighted with this elegant present ; “ how very kind of his Grace, I shall never be able to thank him. Carlo, sweet Carlo—see how he licks my hand ; what a pretty pink mouth he hath ! His coat, too, smooth as silk—pretty, pretty Carlo, how I will doat on thee.”

At this moment Sir Eustace de Mountfort, returned from his morning’s ride, entered the apartment unperceived by Matilda or her page, so intent were they in admiring and caressing Carlo.

“ And pray, Lady Matilda, who is the happy object of this sudden love ?” said De Mountfort smiling ; his

ear having caught the last words which she had uttered.

“Eustace!” exclaimed Matilda, starting at the sound of his voice, and blushing at his question; “I am so glad thou art come; look what the good King hath sent me. See, is he not a sweet little creature?”

“Indeed he is!” answered De Mountfort, gently stroking the animal’s head; “nor do I wonder at thy admiration, Matilda, for although I have seen many of his species before, I have never beheld one to be compared with Carlo! The King deserves thy best thanks for such a present, and when I acquaint thee with the honour he has conferred on me, which I will communicate to thee after our morning’s repast, thou wilt have fresh cause to admire his Grace’s goodness and generosity. But come, love! his Grace and thy father await us.”

Matilda, recommending Carlo to the peculiar care and attention of Edward, accompanied her lover. On her entrance, John arose.

“A good morrow to your Grace!” said Matilda, curtseying.

“We thank thee, Lady. A good morrow it needs must be, when bidden by one so fair!” replied the King smiling, and taking her hand, kissed it, and led her to her seat.

“I am indebted to your Grace a thousand thanks for the darling little creature your Grace was pleased to present me with.”

“ And thy thanks, Lady, o’erpay us for the gift ; happy little wretch to be caressed by such a mistress ! ”

The King, Fitz-Walter, Matilda, and her lover, were the only persons who partook of the breakfast,— by the King’s particular request, or rather command, the rest of the company at the castle being regaled in the grand hall ; the smallness of the party, however, did not render it less agreeable, but rather added to its pleasure by being unrestrained by ceremony, and the good humour and pleasant converse of the monarch, his affability and courteous demeanour, gained more and more upon the good graces of his three amiable subjects. John never exerted his abilities to such advantage. The whole tenor of his behaviour was managed so craftily, that the most cunning might have been deceived ; although he was, in reality, in very good humour at the success of his scheme with young De Mountfort, who, as he foresaw, had eagerly closed with his proposals ; and, indeed, had received the King’s commands with the sincerest gratitude.

Before retiring from the banquet on the preceding evening, John had intimated his wish to Fitz-Walter and the young Knight, that they should be in readiness in the morning to attend him on a ride through the various parts of the city, and in obedience to his commands, as we have seen, they departed by day-break. After a short desultory conversation, the King led by degrees to the subject which was uppermost in his thoughts.

“Our intention in coming to Castle Baynard,” said John to Fitz-Walter and De Mountfort, who rode on each side of him, “was to engage thee, Fitz, in an embassy to Philip; we selected thee—our heart chose thee from amidst our numerous friends, knowing we could place our dearest dependance on thy loyalty;” the Baron bowed, and the King continued: “Perhaps, after the good and noble entertainment which we have received at thy hands, thou wilt not be a little surprised to hear, that we have since our arrival altered our previous intentions!” Fitz-Walter looked rather confused and astonished at this language, nor was De Mountfort less so. John perceived the critical situation in which both his hearers were placed, and rejoined before the Baron could make any reply; “But we have considered all the former services which thou hast rendered the state, and conceive that quiet repose within thy castle walls will be more desirable to thee, than the exertions of mind and body which are necessary in an embassy.” Fitz-Walter and De Mountfort experienced the greatest suspense, indeed, the King’s words were not calculated to excite any very pleasurable sensations in the breast of either; at every period they were both eager to reply to the King, but the moment they would have addressed him he commenced again, utterly precluding them from speaking.—“We have, therefore,” added John, “for the love we bear thee, fixed on thy intended son, Sir Eustace de Mountfort!”

Relieved and surprised at this favourable conclu-

sion, they both smiled with pleasure. The King held out his hand to De Mountfort, who saluted it, his cheeks burning with confusion at this unexpected mark of the King's favour.

"Oh! your Grace," exclaimed Fitz-Walter, his heart palpitating with joy, "this is too much—"

"Hold!" said John, quickly interrupting him; "we pray thee spare us your thanks. It is our greatest pleasure to reward those who merit our favour by their fealty; a King is more blessed in one loving subject than a father in the love of his whole family."

But little conversation passed after this till their return, their hearts were too full for utterance, and John read in the countenances of both how completely he had won them by his interested kindness.

When they had sat rather an unusual length of time at their repast, the Baron begged Matilda to retire, as they had affairs of importance to transact with his Grace. She immediately obeyed. The King gave De Mountfort all the necessary directions for the negotiating of his affairs; which, indeed, required but little difficulty in the execution, being only hastily framed to suit his own dark purposes; and so eager was John for his departure, that he promised to have the proper documents prepared for him by the following day; but neither the Baron or Sir Eustace were displeased with this haste, and rather attributed it to the goodness of the King than to any hidden design. The instant they had concluded, and poured

forth their thanks to their sovereign, De Mountfort sought the fair Matilda to impart to her the news of his departure.

She was sitting admiring the gambols of the little greyhound, with which Edward was at play. Sir Eustace made a sign to Edward, who instantly quitted the apartment, taking with him his favourite Carlo.

In the greatness of the honour, De Mountfort had overlooked the difficulty of parting; but now that he was on the point of acquainting his beloved with the intelligence, his heart endured sensations of regret which he found it impossible to repress. He seated himself on the couch beside the lovely Matilda, and taking her hand affectionately in his:—

“ My dear Matilda,” said he, “ our good sovereign hath been pleased to appoint me ambassador to the court of France, to arrange certain affairs of consequence to the state, and we—I—of course, my love, some time will elapse ere I shall return; probably not more than a month, and as I intend to depart early to-morrow——” *

“ To-morrow!” exclaimed Matilda, surprised at the suddenness of the affair; “ to-morrow, Eustace; nay, not so soon? For a month, too! Surely thou wilt not quit us to-morrow; there is not time to bid thee adieu in that short space. If thou must go, Eustace, defer it to a later day!”

“ I cannot protract even the hour of my departure, my love; the King will deliver me my credentials early to-morrow, and I must be prepared to go the moment

I receive them," replied Sir Eustace; " but 'twere better, love, that I should leave thee now, my return will be the speedier."

" But, to-morrow, dear Eustace!" cried Matilda, sobbing and bursting into tears.

De Mountfort pressed her fondly to his heart, and kissed away the pearly drops from her cheeks.

" Matilda!" cried he, " where is thy fortitude? Shouldst thou not rather rejoice than weep at my good fortune? Come, my sweet, dry thy tears; let not the eye of the King behold a single trace of sorrow on thy cheek, but let thy joyful smiles thank him for the honour he has conferred on thy lover; consider, to-morrow will soon be here."

" Too soon!" sighed Matilda.

" Therefore," continued he, " let us not waste the time in unavailing tears, but enjoy the few hours we have left us, and forget, in looking forward to our reunion, the sadness of the present moment. Thou know'st how dearly I love thee, Matilda, and think not my feelings are less poignant than thy own."

" Forgive me, Eustace;" said Matilda, her blue eyes still dimmed with tears; " I feel how wrong it is to act thus, but thou took'st me on the sudden, and I could not repress my tears or my heart would have burst; forgive me, Eustace, for wailing at thy good fortune, and for thy sake I will strive to forget 'tis pain to part!"

" I thank thee, dearest Matilda," said De Mountfort. It was in vain she essayed by a feigned sprightliness

to overcome her sorrow; there was a tremulous tone in her voice, a cast of melancholy o'er her lovely features, that belied the forced gaiety of her speech. Months had elapsed since she first became acquainted with De Mountfort, and he was now her constant companion, her acknowledged lover, and she had never dreamed of a separation. Sir Eustace endeavoured by cheerful conversation to amuse her mind, and placed her harp before her to divert her attention. She ran over the chords and played a lively air; then, by degrees, changed to a more melancholy strain, accompanying it with her voice.

A BALLAD.

I.

A lily, fairest flower!
Raised her snowy head,
Gay zephyrs round her playing.
Morn was blushing red.
Honey bees came wooing
With a balmy kiss;
The joyous flow'r fluttered
In excess of bliss!
Ah! well-a-day!

II.

But, alas! a cloud eclips'd
Phœbus' cheering ray,
And darkness drew her veil
O'er the face of day;
The rain in torrents pouring,
The winds in pity sigh'd,
The flow'r hung her weeping head,
And drooping, fell, and died!
Ah! well-a-day!

Sir Eustace spent the remainder of the morning in the company of Matilda, endeavouring to dissipate her melancholy ; and afterwards, as soon as he could again possibly withdraw himself from the King and the assembled knights, he sought the society of her he loved, and passed the evening with her ; yet the hours flew quickly by, and the approach of night soon warned him to depart. Matilda took a single lock of her flaxen hair, and presenting it to De Mountfort :—

“ Wear this for my sake ;” said she, “ and forget not Matilda.”

“ Forget thee, Matilda !” exclaimed the Knight, taking the precious gift and placing it in his bosom ; “ Never ! Not the fairest maid in Philip’s court can make my heart waver for a moment in its affection ; to the sharpest glance of love-inspiring eye my heart shall be as adamant ; and pouting lips, tempting the amorous kiss, shall be untouched by mine. I will close mine ears against all melting sighs, and all my thoughts shall be engrossed by thee. A single doubt harboured in thy tender bosom against my faith doth wrong me ; remember all the vows I have sworn a thousand times to thee ; remember the blissful hours we have passed together, and think then, Matilda, can I e’er forget thee ?”

“ Eustace, I do not doubt thee, believe me ;” said Matilda, sighing.

“ Then one more kiss, my love, and I bid thee farewell.”

“ Farewell ?”

“ Yes, it must be so. I cannot see thee again on the morrow, for I shall be far on my journey ere thy lovely eyes are waking ;” replied De Mountfort.

Matilda was silent, she knew her arguments were of no avail, and her lips murmured :—

“ Farewell !” as he embraced her tenderly, and tore himself from her to conceal his emotion.

The next morning, at an early hour, De Mountfort received the papers from the royal hands, the King raised the kneeling Sir Eustace and embraced him. The Baron was present and partook of the pleasure of this moment ; in short, they were all equally delighted. From what various causes arise the same effects : Fitz-Walter’s heart was filled with gratitude to the King, and almost parental love for De Mountfort ; the King was rejoiced at the success of his design ; and Sir Eustace was gratified and dazzled with the honours which the King heaped on him, merely to serve his own sinister views, and in order to crush the young Knight’s fondest, dearest hopes.

“ Sir Eustace !” said the King, “ Remember, in this affair thou dost represent our royal person ; thou art our tongue wherewith we speak our sentiments in Philip’s ear ; our beloved delegate. Therefore, be wary in thy speech and conduct towards the Frank, for it will need all thy policy and cunning to foil the artifice of that Prince. We know him, and will keep a strict watch upon his every action. On thy good sense, thy love and loyalty, we do rely with the utmost confidence ; so God speed thee !”

De Mountfort departed, and descended to the court-yard, where his attendants were awaiting him: the Baron followed and embraced him affectionately.

“ Cherish thy daughter, my beloved Matilda, in my absence;” said Sir Eustace, pressing the good Baron’s hand with fervour; “ and bid her again farewell for me. For mine, and for thy own sake, love and solace her; farewell!”

“ Farewell, my son!” replied Fitz-Walter.

Sir Eustace de Mountfort mounted his charger, the trumpet sounded merrily, and the young Knight, followed by his whole train, passed through the gates of the hospitable Castle Baynard, loudly cheered by all its inmates, with whom his generous disposition had rendered him a particular favourite.

CHAPTER VII.

Glo. He that bereft thee, lady, of thy husband,
Did it to help thee to a better husband.

Anne. His better doth not breathe upon the earth.

Richard III.

SIR Eustace de Mountfort did not quit the castle unseen by Matilda, although at so early an hour. The affectionate maid had heard all the bustle of preparation, and longed once more to bid her lover adieu, to hear him gently whisper a vow of constancy in her ear, to receive one more parting embrace ; but this De Mountfort had denied her, cruelly, she would have thought, had not the conviction of his sincerity banished the idea from her mind. A casement in the chamber of Maude, which overlooked the court-yard, offered an excellent situation for Matilda to witness his departure. In a few minutes she saw him descend the steps with her father, embrace him, mount his Barbary, and pass the gates, followed by his retainers ; and when she could no longer see him, the tears coursed each other down her cheeks. De Mountfort did not cast a single look towards the spot where she stood, and Matilda imagined she should not have ex-

perienced half the sorrow if he had only just looked or waved his hand to her. Maude was not less grieved than her dear Lady, though her sorrow was expressed rather more audibly ; she sobbed and wrung her hands, and her cheeks were wet with streaming tears. Her sorrow was two-fold ; she sympathized with her Lady, and also wept the loss of a lover, in the person of the obsequious Monsieur Jaques. This good-natured Gaul had so ingratiated himself into the favour of Sir Eustace, that the Knight had prevailed on the Baron to allow him to accompany his embassy to France, having often heard Jaques express a desire to revisit his family and friends in that clime ; and not even love, and the pressing solicitations of pretty Maude, could prevail upon Jaques to decline the kind offer of De Mountfort. Matilda, with a heavy heart, retired again to her own chamber, and remained there till summoned by her father.

Fitz-Walter observed the moisture in his daughter's eyes ; he knew the cause, and would not wound her feelings by the slightest remark. But the King beheld the traces of sorrow on her pallid cheek with feelings which did but little honour to his heart, for he envied the happiness of him for whom her tears were shed, without possessing the courage or resolution to become as virtuous and deserving of such love. He complained of being dull and melancholy, and begged Matilda to amuse him with the cheerful sound of her harp and the music of her voice. She obeyed, but her heart took no part in the performance ; she

played mechanically, but she found it utterly impossible to sing, her voice refused its office, for sighs and sobs had weakened its execution and dulled its usual brilliancy. Solitude would have been more agreeable to her in the present state of her mind, and a little reflection would doubtless have dissipated the sadness which the sudden departure of her lover had occasioned ; at present, nothing could be more dissonant to her feelings than music ; yet, notwithstanding her sorrow, she was grateful to the King for the favours conferred on De Mountfort, and what at first was only endured through complaisance and gratitude to John, by degrees became really amusing, and her natural vivacity and good humour burst forth again in all their charms. The King felt all the influence of her fascinating manners ; the sweetness and simplicity of her speech ravished his ears, and the natural grace of her every action called forth his warmest admiration, and added fuel to the illicit flame which burned within his breast ; and when the absence of Fitz-Walter afforded him an opportunity of avowing his sentiments, he threw off all that distant courtesy with which he had always addressed her, seated himself beside her, and, taking her hand, pressed it familiarly to his heart, and gazed upon her lovely countenance with such ardour that the blood mounted into her cheeks ; breathless with astonishment at this freedom, she would have instantly retired, but her agitated and trembling limbs refused their aid.

“ *Lovely Matilda !* ” exclaimed the King, still grasp-

ing her hand; “ Why dost thou tremble thus? We had hoped to have excited a far different sentiment than fear in that dear bosom. Nay, frown not; 'twere pity to ruffle so fair a face with anger; recal those winning smiles which played around thy lips a moment since, let them come like welcome harbingers of joy and happiness to our wounded heart.—Nay, struggle not, sweet angel; this white and trembling hand shall be our prisoner till thou hast heard the declaration of our love; yes, Matilda, we love, adore thee!”

Matilda started from her couch, and at the same moment extricated her hand.

“ What hath your Grace observed in my behaviour that merits this gross insult?” said she, frowning indignantly.

“ Insult?” exclaimed John, surprised in his turn at the firmness of the maid, and rising from his seat, stood so as effectually to prevent her escape from the apartment; “ Insult? and is our love termed so harshly? Matilda, we knew thy love for De Mountfort, but he is no longer here to stand betwixt the sunshine of thy smiles and thy sovereign, casting us in the shade. He is no more an obstacle in our way; a few days will see him in the gay court of France, and think'st thou his warm heart will resist the smiles of the gallic beauties? No one has e'er been proof against their allurements; think not Sir Eustace is infallible; no, his hours will pass in sweet dalliance with the fair, his truant thoughts will ne'er recur to England or Matilda.”

“ Oh ! that the much-injured Knight were here. But now I see the cause of all this haste ; it breaks upon me now in all the glaring light of truth. Pity that loyalty like his should be abused !” said Matilda, with all the pride of virtuous innocence, aroused by the barefaced villany of the King ; “ but I scorn all base insinuations cast against De Mountfort’s character ; his honour is too bright to be tarnished by the breath of calumny, and I do detest, despise, and hate the tongue that dares to sully the name of one of England’s bravest Knights !”

“ Madam,” exclaimed John, touched with the severity of her language, “ thou dost forget thou speakest to thy King !”

“ The King hath forgotten himself !” replied Matilda.

“ True, too true,” said the King, in a softened and milder tone, “ we do confess our error and implore thy forgiveness, lovely Matilda ; our love towards thee hath been the cause of all. We thought De Mountfort undeserving of such a treasure—he appeared not to value thee ; and, burning with love, we determined to snatch the prize from him whose carelessness hath rendered him unworthy of it ; if we have erred—love, the sincerest love, is ——”

“ I will no longer hear this language !” exclaimed Matilda, endeavouring to pass ; but the King caught her in his arms, and laughed at her fruitless struggles ; she screamed for help, and the Baron, alarmed at her cries, rushed into the apartment, followed by the

faithful Edward. The King placed Matilda on the couch.

“ What means this outrage ? ” exclaimed Fitz-Walter, grasping the arm of the King and thrusting him aside, while Edward ran to his Lady’s support, mingling his tears with hers.

“ Traitor ! ” said the King, foaming with rage and disappointment, “ Dar’st thou lift thy hand against thy lawful Sovereign ? ”

“ Traitor ? ” answered Fitz-Walter, “ My actions never yet deserved that name. Is it treason to protect my child ? O King, thou little knowest the heart thou hast wounded by this attempt upon the honour of my house ; I have fought and bled for thee in the field ; supported thee with my best means in every expedition ; in every thing been true and loyal—and is this the recompense of my services ? Is this the return thou makest for the hospitality and welcome I gave thee ; and was all thy show of friendship towards De Mountfort but to withdraw him from my daughter ? Yes, ’tis too true ; O, my heart almost bursts with rage and indignation at this foul conspiracy —— ”

“ Listen ; hear us but one moment,” interrupted John ; “ ’tis true, we love thy daughter, and most truly so, for who can behold and love her not ? And here we freely offer her participation in our fortunes, and though we cannot raise her to England’s throne, she shall be queen and mistress of our heart ! ”

Fitz-Walter turned pale with rage ; his lips quivered, and his eyes flashed fire at this infamous proposal.

“ Now call me traitor if thou wilt,” exclaimed he, “ for such thy words have made me ; and, as I once stood foremost in the ranks of loyalty, so do I hate thee now as heartily as then I loved thee. How base, vile, and ungrateful, in a King, to wish to heap dis- honour on one, whose fortune, life, and honour, have ever been exerted in his defence ; but I have received thee as a guest within this castle’s walls, and they protect thee from an angry father’s wrath !”

“ These threats, proud Baron, shall meet a warm reply anon. By the Trinity ! I vow to bend thy stub- born pride, and for what we deign to ask at present, our acceptance shall be humbly sued.”

Replying thus, the King turned his back upon the justly enraged and injured Fitz-Walter, and imme- diately assembling his Knights and attendants, in the course of half an hour quitted Castle Baynard, to the utter astonishment of his retinue, who could not pos- sibly conceive the meaning of this hasty and uncere- monious departure ; the evident marks of uncontrol- lable anger visible in the King’s countenance convinced them it was no common cause that had excited it, but the sullen silence and moroseness of John forbade any interrogation even from those with whom he was most familiar ; they all feared the bursting of the storm which darkened his brow, and tacitly, though reluc- tantly, obeyed his commands.

The Baron’s vassals were no less surprised than the King’s men, and old Ambrose shook his head and sighed to every question put to him, for he was in as

much perplexity and doubt as the rest, and could only suppose it was something of a very serious nature, prophetic of danger and trouble to his dear master.

When the King left Fitz-Walter, the latter instantly repaired to his daughter's chamber, where Edward had conducted her during the war of words between the Baron and his Sovereign.

“ My dearest Matilda !” said he, taking the weeping girl in his arms and pressing her to his bosom, “ dry thy tears ; whilst thy father lives and can wield a sword thou hast nought to fear. Let the hope of thy Eustace's quick return cheer thy heart, he will gain more honour in this embassy than the King advantage. Plainly I perceive the cunning of John in this affair, but he has been completely foiled through his own eagerness—he was too impetuous ; what an unfeeling wicked heart must he possess to offend thy ears with his fulsome vows of love, even on the morn of thy betrothed husband's departure. Oh ! if e'er I buckle on my harness, or unsheathe my steel in his cause again, may some base thrall pluck from my brow the laurels I have won, and Fitz-Walter be hereafter named by the good and virtuous with abhorrence.”

“ But, dear father, have we not much to fear from John's vindictive spirit ?” demanded Matilda.

“ Not openly ; for all the world united, would, in such a cause, turn their swords against him,” replied the Baron. “ Secretly, perhaps, his revenge may work, but we will keep a watchful eye upon him, and admit no suspicious strangers within the gates ; and

thy rambles, sweet wench, must be limited by the castle walls, till some new scheme employs the thoughts of John."

" But dost thou think, my dear father, Sir Eustace is safe ?" inquired the affectionate Matilda.

" I do not feel the least fear on his account," replied Fitz-Walter ; " he is surrounded by his own brave vassals who will spill their hearts' blood to preserve him from harm ; and methinks, sweet daughter, 'twere better to let him remain in ignorance of this occurrence ; for his love for thee and fear for thy safety would cause him unnecessary pain and trouble. Let him pursue his way in peace, and he will soon arrange the affairs with which he is intrusted, and return to England and to thee ; we will then relate to him our injuries, when time shall have blunted the acuteness of those feelings which would now give a ghastly colouring to that which then we shall laugh at and despise, as being past."

" Heaven send it may be as thou say'st, father !" sighed Matilda.

Fitz-Walter remained above an hour with Matilda, and by his soothing arguments effectually convinced her of her own safety, and what was dearer to her, that of her lover. All those evils which her fears had conjured up, vanished before the consoling influence of his tongue, and before he quitted her, her innocent heart had partly recovered its usual tranquillity, and her native bloom returned to deck her cheeks. Yet, although he had convinced Matilda of their security, his paternal

love had prompted the kind deception; but he could not deceive himself, for he knew that he had every thing to fear from the villainy of John.

He summoned his vassals, and ordered them to be particularly strict in guarding the castle, and bade them admit no strangers within the gates without his sanction. The sudden departure of John had prepared them for something extraordinary, and therefore they did not evince so much amazement at these commands as they would otherwise have done; but a thousand strange conjectures arose in their minds as to the right cause, but all wide of the truth, for they could not possibly suspect the King of such perfidy as he had been guilty of.

For several days all went on in the ordinary course, and no strangers or suspicious characters were seen near or applied for admittance at the castle, and the impression of mystery which the Baron's commands had made on them, began to wear off; when, one tempestuous day about noon, the rain pouring down in torrents, the horn summoned the warder to the gate; he opened the wicket and beheld a tall man, muffled in a large coarse cloak; he examined him with an eye of suspicious scrutiny, and demanded his errand.

“ I bear something for the Baron. Open, friend, and let me see him instantly;” said the stranger eagerly.

“ Hold!” replied the cautious warder, who shrewdly suspected this might be one of the secret enemies the Baron feared; “ I must first know who and what thou

art, ere I let thee pass. What is thy business and thy name?"

" My business is—with thy Lord. My name I would willingly give thee, but thou dost not know me, and therefore would it be useless."

" Then I cannot admit thee."

" An' thou wilt not open the gate, at least have the goodness to bear my message to thy Lord."

The warder closed the wicket, and went to inform the Baron of the stranger's request, and after minutely describing his manner, dress, and speech, and his own suspicions, he awaited Fitz-Walter's orders.

" Is he alone?" demanded the Baron.

" Yes, my Lord."

" Give him admittance," said the Baron, after a moment's deliberation.

The warder bowed, and in obedience to his commands soon introduced the stranger.

" What is thy wish with me, friend?" said Fitz-Walter.

" Thou say'st truly, my Lord, when thou call'st me friend; for, in truth, I am so, and few that know Baron Fitz-Walter are otherwise."

The Baron acknowledged this compliment by a slight inclination of his head.

" I have tidings to communicate which concern thee nearly, my Lord," continued the stranger, " and I should wish——" here he looked towards the warder significantly.

" Leave us together," said Fitz-Walter to the

warder, perceiving the stranger's meaning ; " and now we are alone, friend, thy errand ? "

" Thou hast enemies abroad ! "

" I fear it."

" The King ! "

" What of him ? Speak !" cried the Baron eagerly.

" He intends to attack Castle Baynard by surprise."

" How !" exclaimed the Baron, " When—where did'st thou learn this ? "

" Purely by accident, my Lord. I was sitting in a hosterie enjoying a horn of ale after a day's fatigue, when a squire belonging to one of the King's knights came in, just sober enough to pick himself up when drunkenness made him trip. He seated himself beside me, and asked me to treat him. I being truly loyal, could not refuse a mug of ale to a man wearing the King's livery, therefore I gave it him ; and, of course, we were soon ' hail fellow well met,' as the saying is. Being well filled with ale, and his wit being of a light quality soon rose to the top and overflowed, and the fellow let me into the secret, asking me to join the King's forces ; saying, they all expected a rare fine booty, for the King had generously promised to give up the castle to be pillaged and ransacked by his soldiers, only reserving my Lady Matilda for himself. I felt a damme—pardon me, my Lord—rising in my throat, so I took another draught of ale, and gulped both down together, and told him I thought it an excellent joke ; but thinking it was proper, my Lord, that thou should'st

join in the laugh, I came to communicate these particulars."

"I thank thee, my good fellow, for this kind intelligence; how can I recompense thee? Name thy reward!" said the Baron, taking him by the hand. The stranger withdrew it, and bowed to the Baron with humility, apparently thinking he did him too much honour.

"Reward!" exclaimed he, "If I had wanted gold, the King would have bought me. No, my Lord, if thou thinkest well of the bad news I have brought thee, thou art welcome to it. I love fair play. But if thou wilt order me a horn of ale, and allow me to dry my clothes at thy fire, I shall feel greatly obliged."

"To what am I to attribute this disinterestedness? What is thy name?"

"Walter, my Lord."

"Accept this trifle," said the Baron, offering him a beautiful green silk bourse embroidered with pearls and well filled with coin; "and still, Walter, I shall remain thy debtor."

"Pardon me, my Lord;" replied Walter, respectfully putting back the Baron's hand; "but if thou would'st grant me one favour——"

"Name it," cried Fitz-Walter, "I promise thee."

"Then I wish, my Lord, to shoot a bolt or two at these knaves under shadow of thy battlements."

"I understand thee, Walter, and willingly do I accept the offer of thy services, and shall be proud of such a soldier."

The Baron, convinced of the disinterested character of Walter, no longer pressed his acceptance of pecuniary reward, but humouring his disposition, ordered him refreshment and dry clothes. The commands of Fitz-Walter to pay him every attention were needless ; for his own natural and irrepressible good humour soon made him friends among the vassals, and never did such a merry scene occur in Castle Baynard as when the Fool and Walter met. The hall shook with peals of laughter at the endeavours of the two wits to outvie each other, till they were compelled to hold their tongues for want of breath ; then hugging each other in the most ludicrous manner, the Fool vowed henceforth to call him " Brother," convinced they were born under the same planet ; or, as Walter said, " were made of the same piece of clay."

Baron Fitz-Walter, after a short consultation with the knights and gentlemen who were in his service, in which he laid before them the infamous intentions of the King, which they heard with the greatest indignation and abhorrence, decided to despatch messengers to his brother Barons to call in their aid against this formidable enemy. The castle was provisioned and put in order of defence, and the knights, gentlemen, bowmen, and villeins, were soon equipped in their warlike habiliments and placed under the command of their respective officers, expecting and prepared for an immediate attack. It was impossible, from the bustle and commotion in the castle, to conceal from Matilda the cause of this hasty preparation, but when her

father communicated to her the King's designs, the indignation of her soul overcame her fears, and seizing her father's hand, she exclaimed, with the most heroic and determined ardour :

“ Father, if the King dare put his threat in execution—if he be so shameless, so hardened in villany as to approach thy walls with an armed force—our men are true hearted, brave and firm in our cause, let us grant him no quarter ; no, nor accede to any the least of his disgraceful proposals, but defend the castle to the last extremity ; and if he prove victorious, which heaven forbid ! oh, rather let us fire the castle, and perish in the flames, than resign ourselves to his polluting touch !”

Fitz-Walter gazed with wonder and admiration to hear his daughter express herself with such unwonted vehemence, yet his heart applauded her sentiments, for they were in unison with his own, and embracing her with emotion, he replied :—

“ Matilda ! I love thee—but if the chance of war decide against us—it must, it shall be so. But justice is on our side, and we have every thing to hope from the succour of my brother Barons, who one and all despise King John. I have been the only one who stood firmly by him in the hour of danger, and yet as firmly opposed him whene'er I thought his measures were oppressive, and still was loyal ; for then I considered it was rather an error of his judgment, than his heart. He is a King, but he is also a man, and he

repays my fidelity with insult. Oh! wretched King, to turn thus traitor to himself."

The unexpected firmness of Matilda inspired him with additional courage, and he now regarded the menaces of the King with feelings bordering on indifference, placing the utmost reliance upon the friendship and assistance of the Barons.

CHAPTER VIII.

The King will give you battle presently.

* * * * *

He calls us rebels, traitors; and will scourge
With haughty arms this hateful name in us.

First Part Henry IV.

ON the second day of Walter's arrival at Castle Baynard, the faithful warder came with a hurried step, and countenance full of importance, into the presence of Baron Fitz-Walter, who had already made every preparation in his power for the defence of the castle, and now remained in hourly expectation of the King's arrival.

“ Speak !” cried the Baron, “ what news requires this haste ?”

“ My Lord,” replied the warder, “ a youth on a brown mare, mottled with her own foam, is at the portal, and demands to speak with Walter.”

“ That name’s his pass ; throw wide the gate, for Walter’s friends are ours.”

This messenger was no other than Gilbert the Gosling, whom Walter, on account of his simplicity of speech and appearance, had selected as a proper spy

on the King's motions, and had stationed him a few miles from the city, on the road which he expected the King to come, that he might give immediate notice of his approach.

Walter brought his friend before the Baron. He was panting and almost breathless, so swiftly had he flown along, and the big drops of perspiration rolled from his brow like tears, which, added to the dusty condition of his garments, gave him truly a miserable appearance.

“ My Lord ! ” said Walter, bowing and pulling Gilbert forward by the sleeve of his doublet, for he seemed half inclined to slink away, so abashed was he at the presence of the great Baron; “ my friend, Gilbert, hath just brought me information of the King's coming ; he is within an hour's march of London.”

“ Accept my thanks,” replied Fitz-Walter to Gilbert ; “ hereafter, if heaven prosper me, I will bestow on thee something more substantial in reward for this intelligence. To thy foresight, Walter, I am deeply indebted ; this precaution of thine reflects honour both on thy heart and judgment. But look to thy friend, he needs refreshment to recruit his strength.”

Walter retired with his friend Gilbert, who was mightily taken with the kindness of the Baron, and with a light heart and an empty stomach he proceeded to pay his respects to a venison pasty and a flagon of good wine.

Fitz-Walter immediately published the intelligence

he had received to all those assembled within the castle.

“ The King is near,” said the Baron, “ and in a few minutes he will be beneath our walls. His intention is to surprise us, but chance hath ordained it otherwise, and I see myself surrounded by my fellow citizens and friends ready to draw in my defence. Ye true knights! I know how to appreciate your services; it is not the first time we have drawn our swords to beat down the iron arm of oppression, and I place the firmest reliance on your valour. Vassals! ye have always shewn your love and duty to your Lord—an opportunity now offers to prove that your courage and fidelity have not degenerated, and I expect every thing from your exertions. Although,” continued the Baron, “ I have not the least doubt as to the real intentions of the King, yet on his arrival before the castle, I should wish no signs of hostility on my part to appear, but let it seem according to his design, that he is unexpected. But the moment he avows himself, at the sound of the trumpet let every man fly to his post, and we’ll unfurl the city banner in defiance. This manœuvre will something damp their courage, and chill the ardour of their attack.”

As he concluded, loud huzzas and cries of “ Long live the good Baron Fitz-Walter,” rent the air.

The entrance of King John, soon after, into the city, with such a numerous body of soldiers, surprised and alarmed the peaceful citizens. Women and children were seen flying in all directions; and all the shop-

keepers hastily closed their shutters, and retreated to their upper stories to view them as they passed, and the principal streets were soon filled with armed men. As John approached Castle Baynard, he viewed with pleasure the peaceful security and quiet which seemed to reign throughout the princely fabric. He despatched a herald, who was instantly admitted without the least hesitation or delay ; this appearance of unconcern and want of caution was highly flattering to John's hopes, and he promised himself, in case his demands met with a refusal, an easy and speedy victory. The herald, immediately on his admission, was conducted to the Baron, and forthwith delivered his message.

“ In the name of our most gracious sovereign King John, I do proclaim thee, Robert Fitz-Walter, a traitor, and command thee instantly to deliver up thyself to the laws of thy country, thy life having become forfeit to the same. But it hath moreover pleased our merciful King to say : that in consideration of thy giving up thy daughter Matilda the Fair, he will extend to thee his royal pardon ! God save the King ! ”

“ Tell thy master, fellow, his royal pardon and his hated proposals are alike despised ! ” replied the Baron, and turned his back on the astonished herald, who instantly left the hall.

The proclamation had been reported to those who had assembled in the court-yard, and justly enraged at the gross indignity offered to their Baron, the

vassals by groans, hisses, and maledictions on the King's head, plainly manifested their anger; and as the trembling herald passed through this dreaded phalanx, one of the soldiers, too highly exasperated to confine himself to reviling, raised his spear against the herald, and would have certainly despatched him, if Walter, who stood near, had not suddenly rushed forward and struck down the weapon, and with such force and accuracy that the iron head flew from the staff.

“ *Madman!*” cried he, “ would'st thou bring dis-
honour and disgrace on thy Lord, by spilling the blood
of this knave of the King's? A'God's name, let us
not imitate the perfidy of his master by shedding his
blood, but let him pass without injury to a single hair
of his moustache! ”

This truly noble behaviour was felt by all, and they allowed the herald egress without molestation, and he who had been the cause of this spirited reproof, took Walter by the hand and thanked him, vowing that he should have been miserable if he had killed the man, though his choler had risen so high at the infamous words of the proclamation, that he had been blinded and suddenly impelled to do a deed at which upon reflection he shuddered with horror.

The King, incensed at the disdainful reply of Fitz-Walter, commanded his forces to the castle and to destroy all who offered resistance. The preparations for an attack were observed from the castle, and the trumpet sounded, and the city banner was displayed.

As the King's party marched up to the gates, they

were saluted unexpectedly by a flight of arrows, which threw both men and horses into the greatest confusion, and they retreated in the utmost disorder. John, convinced an entrance was not to be effecting with the facility he had imagined, and perceived the battlements filled as it were instantaneously with soldiers, sent a strong party with battering-rams to force a passage, but their endeavours likewise proved fruitless, for the besieged cast boiling pitch, heavy stones, and missiles of every description upon the assailants, and they were finally obliged to retreat with considerable loss. Upon this second defeat, John immediately ordered scaling ladders to be raised in various places, and notwithstanding the courageous resistance of the Baron's party, the King's soldiers were so numerous, that they began to gain the advantage, for as quickly as some were cut down, others immediately filled their places. Having once gained a footing, they fought furiously, kept their ground, and gave their comrades time to mount the ramparts, and they poured in like an overwhelming torrent ; the Baron's men were retreating in dismay before them, when the appearance of Fitz-Walter inspired them with fresh courage.

“ On, my brave fellows !” cried the Baron, “ Shrink not before these holiday knights who have never fleshed their polished blades.—Charge !”

“ Thou liest, thou hoary headed traitor !” roared out a knight with a stentorian voice, and rushed upon the Baron. He was of an extraordinary stature ; his

large and muscular limbs were clad in black armour studded with gold, and an immense plume of black feathers waved in his casque ; his vizor was up, but his thick bushy eye-brows, black curly beard and mustachios, almost entirely concealed his swarthy countenance.

“ De Lacy !” replied Fitz-Walter, recognising the Knight,—“ I am no traitor, and it grieves me much to meet thee in so vile a cause.”

“ Thy grief, old boy, shall be but short lived. But I came not to parley with an outlaw ; so—have at thee !” said De Lacy, at the same time furiously attacking him. The Baron parried his passes with the greatest coolness and intrepidity, and the fire which flashed from the piercing eyes of the Knight, did not in the least intimidate his valiant antagonist. The giant strength and mighty blows of De Lacy struck terror into the hearts of Fitz-Walter’s vassals, they trembled for the fate of their beloved Lord ; but the superior skill of the Baron eluded his blows, and De Lacy received a deep wound in his thigh ; he gnashed his teeth with rage and pain, and the blood gushed forth in a crimson torrent over his jet-black armour. With demoniac fury he grasped his massy sword with both hands, and aimed a tremendous blow ; even his own men shrunk back with fear and horror at his terrible aspect ; but Fitz-Walter was undaunted, and dexterously stepping aside avoided the blow which threatened inevitable destruction, and before De Lacy could recover his guard, plunged his reeking weapon

in his heart. He fell without a groan. De Lacy's men now fled in their turn before the victorious Baron and his faithful vassals, and the victory seemed almost decided in their favour, when the gates of the castle, which had resisted every effort of the besiegers, at length gave way with a horrid crash. The vassals were again thrown into confusion, and amid the shouts, cries, and groans, which filled the air, the Baron's voice was heard endeavouring to rally and encourage his men; all those who had been stationed on the battlements to annoy the enemy, seeing the dismay of their comrades, flew to their aid; Walter with his bowmen was foremost.

“Now throw aside your bows, my boys; draw your swords for close quarters. By Saint Mary! they have battered down the gates; fly to the Baron's assistance or all is lost!”

Encouraged by this reinforcement, the vassals once more opposed the enemy; the Baron led on his men, and whoever came within the reach of his faulchion fell beneath its weight, for despair lent a supernatural strength to his vigorous arm. But a blow from a heavy battle-axe struck the faulchion from his hand, he staggered and fell; the deadly weapon was raised to strike the fatal blow; when Walter, who was near, striding across the fallen Fitz-Walter, received the weapon upon his target, and sheathed his sword in the Knight's body, who wielded the battle-axe.

Fitz-Walter was soon raised by his faithful followers, and borne, almost insensible, into the castle;

the tide was turning fast against them, and all their efforts to repulse the invaders appeared fruitless ; they were fatigued and discouraged, yet desperately determined to die in defence of their Lord and of Lady Matilda, and nearly one-third of their comrades were dead or wounded. When all hope had fled from their breasts, the sound of several trumpets was suddenly heard, and six heralds rode into the castle, between the contending parties. Every man held his hand, and the heralds called loudly for the King. John rode forward on a white charger, surrounded by forty of his Knights.

“ King John !” said one of the heralds—“ In the name of the united Barons of England, we do desire thee instantly to desist, and to withdraw thy forces from Castle Baynard ; and we do further proclaim, in the event of thy persisting in this tyrannous and illegal warfare, that they do declare war against thee.”

“ What, shall our subjects preach to us ? Dare they —— ”

“ The Barons ! The Barons ! Huzza ! Huzza !” loudly exclaimed Fitz-Walter’s party, as they actually entered the gates, accompanied by an immense number of their vassals, who soon completely covered every part of the castle, and thousands still remained without the walls, ready to succour their comrades ; but their aid was unnecessary. The Barons loudly declaimed against John’s cruelty and oppression, and vented their indignation in the harshest terms.

John's cowardly heart, at this unexpected appearance of the Barons, sunk within him, and he would fain have beat a speedy retreat, but he wished not to depart without an endeavour to palliate his conduct ; and having obtained their attention :—

“ It has ever been our wish, noble Barons,” said he, “ to please ye all ; and what have ye required that we have denied ? Ye bid us depart from this castle, where we have assembled our liegemen to punish a traitor ; one who hath raised his arm against our royal person. But we depend on your justice to judge rightly of our actions ; and hereafter, perchance, ye may repent this interference, and pronounce us right. Yet, far is it from our wish to give the slightest cause for anger to our dear Barons ! We love you too well to thwart ye in any thing, and if it pleasure ye that we depart,—supposing us in error,—so do we bid ye all a kind adieu ! ”

The Barons were not be cozened by this pretended humility and soothing language, and in a cold and haughty manner, returned the King’s salute, who immediately departed with his forty knights, leaving the rest to follow with their wounded.

This happy interposition of the Barons rescued the castle and its brave defenders from destruction, and preserved the lovely Matilda from falling into the power of John, whose surprise and vexation were equally as great as the joy of the vassals at this occurrence ; nor could the King possibly divine how the Barons could have been apprized of his intentions ;

and the only conclusions he could draw, was, that some traitor's tongue had communicated the secret of his expedition to Fitz-Walter.

On the King's departure the Barons instantly repaired to Fitz-Walter, who had now recovered from the effects of his fall, and was sitting in his doublet, for he had permitted his Squires to unarm him, although not till he was assured of the arrival of his brother Barons, and the favourable issue of their interference; Matilda was seated beside him holding his hand in hers. Fitz-Walter arose :—

“ My good friends,” said he, taking them one after another by the hand, “ for this kind aid I owe ye more than gratitude can pay ; but for ye, King John would ere this have forced his way into my castle to bear away my daughter, to tear her from a father's arms ; but he would have met a bitter disappointment, for we had prepared and were resolved to fire the castle on his entrance, and blast his hopes at the price of our lives, and perchance the destruction of his !”

“ Nobly resolved !” exclaimed the Barons.

“ How will your wonder be increased when I inform ye, noble Barons, 'twas this timid, blushing girl, my only daughter, who conceived the project and proposed it first !”

The Barons gazed upon the lovely Matilda with astonishment, but this feeling soon gave way to the warmest expressions of admiration, and they all and one, called down blessings on Matilda the Fair, and drawing their swords, gallantly vowed in every danger

and difficulty to defend her to the death. Matilda thanked them in the most winning manner ; and the Baron continued :—

“ This act of John’s oppression and cruelty hath turned my heart against him. Hath he not enemies enough abroad, but he must make him foes at home ? Barons ! he hath infringed our dearest rights ; let us teach him, we are not to be insulted with impunity, or we shall not long remain secure in our castles. Let all party feuds be for awhile forgotten, and united in this one cause, which is equally interesting to us all, let us demand restitution ; and if he deny us we will forthwith chastise his tyranny and injustice ! His crown sits but lightly on his head !”

The Barons acquiesced with him in the necessity of putting this proposal into execution, and promised their assistance ; and being convinced there was no fear of John’s returning to Castle Baynard, they immediately issued orders for the departure of their vassals to their respective homes.

Fitz-Walter’s attention was now called to his wounded soldiers, and they received the kindest care and treatment ; all the chirurgeons in London were called in, and the Baron visited his men personally, and superintended the operations ; and when they called over the names, they found only thirty of their comrades were slain, although several of those who were still living were very dangerously wounded. Matilda, her maids, and Edward, were busily engaged in preparing bandages, and other articles, for the chi-

surgeons, and tears filled Matilda's eyes when she beheld the faithful vassals, who had so bravely fought in her defence, suffering the most excruciating pain. Walter had not escaped unharmed; the stroke of the battle-axe, which he had courageously warded off from Fitz-Walter, had fractured his arm, and when he submitted it to the inspection of the chirurgeon, the latter shook his head, and told him he feared amputation was unavoidable.

"By St. Dominick! good Mr. Chirurgeon," quoth he, "I'll not be lopped. No, no; patch it up in the best manner thou can'st; but no cutting and sawing; pah! it sets one's teeth on edge to think of it. I would rather loose my head than an arm; for why, I should not feel the loss of the one, but I shall of the other. Moreover it's rather awkward, for meeting with a friend, I may offend him by poking my stump in his eye when I think I'm giving him my hand; therefore no lopping, no lopping, I beseech thee!"

The chirurgeon, in obedience to his wishes, proceeded to set his arm, which was considerably swelled and inflamed. Prompt assistance was offered to the good Baron Fitz-Walter by his fellow-citizens, and the disabled received every possible comfort and attendance.

CHAPTER IX.

Faithful remembrancer of one so dear,
O welcome guest, though unexpected here !

Cooper.

Weeks elapsed ere the inhabitants of Castle Baynard recovered the effects of the King's assault ; and black patches, arm slings, and divers bandages, appeared in every variety of form amongst the vassals. Walter, contrary to the opinion of the chirurgeon, although, owing to his skill and attention, had the pleasing expectation of soon recovering the use of his fractured limb ; at present, however, he was compelled to wear it in a sling. His friend Gilbert the Gosling, was among those who were so fortunate as to escape unharmed in the fray, which was the occasion of many jokes being passed upon him by his facetious friend ; but he had in reality rendered great assistance in hurling with his strong arms the heaviest stones and other missiles upon the besiegers, and his comrades did him ample justice. The day after the battle Marian, "the fat little girl, with the yellow crockets," very much alarmed when she heard her lover had been engaged in defence of the castle, and fearing, perhaps,

the loss of her intended, flew on the wings of love to inquire after her dear Gilbert ; and the meeting, as Walter said, “ was really affecting.”

When they were once more restored to tranquillity, the Baron began to be anxious for De Mountfort’s return ; he had been absent above seven weeks, and yet they had received no tidings of him. Matilda seldom mentioned his name for fear of increasing her father’s trouble by the expression of her own anxiety, but in the solitude of her own chamber she spent many long and dreary nights, waking and weeping ; for she dreaded some dark agent of John’s villainy might strike at the life of her beloved Sir Eustace ; she reflected on all the vicissitudes and dangers they had suffered, the severe trials they had undergone since his departure, and thought that his presence would have effectually shielded them from all harm. But news arrived at length to cheer their drooping spirits.

A loud and sudden blast from the horn, which was suspended at the gate, one day about noon, startled the warden, who had just fallen into a comfortable doze, to which the heat of the day had disposed him. He jumped up, and rubbed one eye, for he had nearly lost the other by a severe blow from a staff in the late battle, and daylight was excluded from the weakened organ by a large patch. He could scarcely place his eye to the wicket before a voice, in the well-known nasal accent of Monsieur Jaques, exclaimed : “ Open de door, mon ami ; vite—depeche !”

The gate was instantly thrown aside, and the gay

Frenchman rushed into the warder's arms to embrace him, but starting back at the sight of the patch,

“ Eh ! quoi ! Comment ! Où avez—vere have you lost your eye ?” inquired he, contracting his brow as if the sight pained him.

“ Thou shalt hear all by-and-by ; such a —— But tell me, Jaques ; how is our good Sir Eustace de Mountfort ?” said the warder, impatiently.

“ Très bien—ver well—grace à Dieu !” replied Jaques, taking the warder by the arm, who straight-way led him to his Lord, knowing how anxiously they wished for intelligence from that quarter, and how much the arrival of Jaques would rejoice both the Baron and Lady Matilda.

“ Mais—j'espère—milor an Milady Matilda are vell, an all de lady, dans le château ?” said the gallant Frenchman.

“ Quite well,” replied the warder.

“ Bon ! et ma belle petite, Maude ?”

“ Maude ? Oh ! she's very well ; but I think she has moped and fretted a great deal about thee, Jaqués !”

“ Ah ! coquin ! tu me flattes ; pauvre fille ! I have not forget her,” said he, sighing.

Matilda's countenance brightened with joy at the appearance of Jaques ; she instantly arose and flew towards him ; and the Baron, who was sitting with her, exclaimed with her in the same breath :

“ What news ? How fares Sir Eustace ?”

“ Ver well, milady ; ver well, my lor,” said he,

bowing and replying to both. "Le chevalier présente his ver best respec wid all love an duty."

"Thank ye, thank ye; but when does he return?" demanded Matilda.

"Trois semaines—tree weeks, milady; for de mos' he shall come back Ah! il est grand favori!"

"I suppose, then," asked the Baron, "as he is so great a favourite, he spends a great deal of time in company?"

"Point de tout, Monseigneur!" replied Jaques. "He is ver triste; dere is no agremens, no plaisirs à la société for le Chevalier; il soupire for Engeland. Ah! mais—j'ai oublié—quelle bêtise! Pardon, milady," said he, fumbling in the breast of his doublet, and drawing forth a small parcel—"He have made me de honneurs to commit dis pacquet to me, for you."

Matilda took it, and, breaking it open, discovered an elegant gold fleur-de-lys, set with the finest brilliants.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Matilda, displaying the glittering bauble to her father. "Did Sir Eustace purchase this in France?"

"Purshase! Non, non!" cried Jaques, shaking his head. "Not purshase; it was for de prize, milady."

"Obtained at a tournament?" said Fitz-Walter.

"Oui, oui, mon—milor!"

"Why, how came this to pass, Jaques; I thought thy countrymen always prided themselves upon their superior skill in joust and tournament?"

“ Oui, en vérité, c'est ainsi—mais—nous—dey do not see un Chevalier de Mountfort every day, Monseigneur !”

After Matilda and the Baron had inquired every little particular concerning Sir Eustace, and almost wearied the patience of Jaques with interrogations, apparently trifling in themselves, but dear to Fitz-Walter and his daughter, from the peculiar interest each felt in the welfare of the young Knight, they permitted him to retire. From every circumstance which Jaques had related, Matilda could only draw one favourable and highly-flattering conclusion, that Sir Eustace de Mountfort, surrounded by all the gaieties and delights of the French court, had still resisted every allurement, and remained constant to her; and if the least doubt had ever existed in her mind respecting his fidelity, it was now entirely obliterated; and she looked forward to his return with feelings of the purest delight.

On Jaques's return to the hall, he was utterly confounded, when he beheld so many of his comrades maimed, patched, and disabled, giving the place the appearance of an hospital.

“ Mort de ma vie !” exclaimed he. “ Vat is de raison of all dis ? Vat horrible fracas has dere been ? Dites moi mes camarades ! Je crois dat you have all loss some membre of your corps ; un bras—une jambe ; un œil—morbleu ! Dites moi la raison de ce changement, je vous prie ?”

When he had thus given vent to his astonishment,

they related to him the whole account of the battle ; the King's perfidy ; Fitz-Walter's intrepidity ; and, finally, the timely arrival of the Barons.

“ Diable ! ” said Jaques, when they had concluded. “ Que ce roi est vilain ! An de pauvre Baron, an milady Matilda, vat affright se mus’ have souffert. Bon Dieu ! if me had been dere, vit ma longue épée, ma great sword — ”

“ We should not have required the assistance of the Barons,” interrupted the Fool. “ There is no doubt, where there was so much fowl play, thou would’st have legged, winged, and spitted some of them. Thy great sword would have been too long for ‘em, though thou would’st not have found any of them too long for thy sword. There would have been no fear of their carrying their point, while thou did’st carry thine ! ”

“ Ah ! quel badinage ! Mais, Monsieur Guy, où—vere are your blessures—your vounds ? Sans doute vous avez trop de courage, de — ”

“ Wounds ? What dost thou take me for ? ”

“ A fool, certainement ! ” replied Jaques, laughing, perceiving he had perplexed the lord of misrule by his question.

“ Ay, verily ! But not such a fool to thrust my head into danger. No, no ; I have too much wit to fight in a losing cause. The wherefore ? It is probable I should gain nothing. If it had pleased ‘em to decide it by word of mouth, then indeed I would have attacked them with the most cutting language, the

most stinging reproof, and opposed them with the most stubborn and insurmountable arguments; but as to opposing my head to a faulchion, lord help us! I am not yet fool enough to see the wit on't."

They all laughed heartily at this merry excuse, and Jaques, after being congratulated by all his friends on his safe arrival in England, and formerly introduced to Walter and the Gosling, departed in search of Maude, who had already heard of his arrival, and therefore he had not much difficulty in seeking one, who was ready to fly to his arms.

Since the King's flagrant behaviour towards her, Matilda had neglected the favourite Carlo, with which he had presented her; and indeed every thing that recalled John to her mind naturally became hateful to her; and she commanded Edward, who could not find in his heart so readily to discard his favourite, never to let her see it again. The page had the greatest difficulty to prevail upon Matilda to allow him to keep it at all at the castle; however, upon condition that he would endeavour, as much as possible, to keep it from her observation, she granted his request. She was sitting one fine evening on the terrace, enjoying the cooling breezes from the river, and playing on her harp for the amusement of the Baron, when the loud yelping of a dog attracted their attention; and looking over the parapet, they beheld poor discarded Carlo, paddling and struggling for his life in the water. Humanity immediately prompted the tender-hearted girl to run for assistance, but at the moment she was

turning to execute her benevolent intentions, Edward, who had been alarmed by the splashing and crying of his dog, sallied from out the water-gate in a small boat, in order to pick him up.

“ I should indeed have wondered,” said Matilda, “ if Edward had been very far from his favourite. It is strange to me how the animal could possibly have fallen into the water; it must certainly have strayed, and been cast in by some stranger; but see how eagerly Edward rows along: well done! Now he hath him—no—what a foolish little creature; how it turns about—now he reaches him. Ah! merciful heavens!” shrieked Matilda, in dismay; for Edward, in endeavouring to reach the dog, had overbalanced himself in his eagerness, and fallen headlong into the water. The Baron instantly flew to his assistance, telling all whom he met in his way towards the water-gate, to follow him; but long ere he could have gained the water’s edge, Edward would have been drowned before the eyes of the distracted Matilda; if, fortunately, two men, who were passing in a boat near the spot, alarmed by the cries of “ Help,” from Matilda, had not rowed towards the walls, just as the page rose for the last time. One of the men, who appeared to be the passenger, immediately threw aside his cap and staff, and plunged into the stream. Matilda experienced the most torturing suspense, but in half a minute the man re-appeared again, bearing the lifeless body of the page; his face, which ever bore the bloom of youth, was now deadly pale, and his beautiful locks

hung wet and lank upon his shoulders. The humane stranger placed the body in the boat, and, with his companion, pushed for the shore, where the Baron and several of the vassals were assembled. The affrighted Matilda, and her attendant greatly alarmed, had by this time also joined the group.

“ Be not alarmed, my Lady!” said the man who bore Edward in his arms. “ The boy is still warm! He lives!”

“ Thank heaven!” exclaimed Matilda, from the very bottom of her heart. They carried her “ poor Edward” into the castle, and used every means to restore animation, and at last their efforts were happily crowned with success; and the first word he uttered was “ Carlo,” still supposing he was seeking his favourite, so suddenly had his immersion in the water robbed him of his recollection.

“ Carlo? Car—, my heart! where am I?” said the page, sitting upright on the couch where they had laid him, and looking on the anxious faces around him. “ Why, have I been dreaming? Maude, sweetheart! speak to me, wilt thou? I’m sure I’m awake now. What’s the matter?”

“ We all thought thou wert drowned, and my lady is so scared and a’most frightened out of her wits;” replied Maude.

“ Oh, run good Maude, and tell my sweet lady I am quite well again; how cruel am I to have given her cause to weep. Ah! my dear lord!” said he, taking the hand of the Baron, who came to inquire after him,

and kissing it, “ Wilt thou pardon me for causing you so much uneasiness ?”

“ Pardon thee, Edward ! with all my heart ! 'twas purely accidental, and to witness thy recovery hath so delighted me, that I could pardon thee even wert thou in fault. But prithee,” continued he, turning to the vassals, “ where is the good man who preserved Edward's life ? Is he not in the castle ?”

One of the vassals answered in the negative, and informed the Baron they had in vain endeavoured to detain him, and that in the confusion he had leaped into the boat, and immediately pushed off. Fitz-Walter inquired if any of them knew him, but they all expressed their ignorance of his name, and of ever having seen him before ; and the Baron, after fruitlessly endeavouring to discover to whom Edward was indebted for his life, returned to his daughter.

“ Thy page is quite recovered, Matilda ; but he, to whose kindness we owe his deliverance from a watery grave, is unknown, and hath departed unrewarded ; and yet, I am almost certain, I have seen his face before, but the dripping condition he was in, and in the confusion, I had not time to examine him closely, and supposed he would, of course, have entered the castle and dried himself. Surely he could not have been offended by our want of attention on such an occasion ; a man possessed of such generous feelings, as this action proves, could never cherish a selfish idea in his breast.”

“ Impossible !” said Matilda, “ but, father, I think

too have some knowledge of his person. Did'st thou not remark the scar over his right eye, his jet-black hair, and his fine dark countenance ? If my memory be not over treacherous, he is the archer who wounded Eustace."

" It is, it is ! " exclaimed the Baron, exultingly, " I now remember his elegant figure, his peculiarly neat dress, his polite and gentlemanly language, he is a noble fellow ! and I think, my love, at the period thou hast mentioned, Walter was with him, perhaps he may give us some more satisfactory account of him. Who waits there ? "

A servant entered.

" I wish to see Walter," said the Baron.

" My lord, he is coming hither ; he is just returned from the vineyards."

At that instant Walter came in, and bowing to Matilda and Fitz-Walter, wished them a good even, and they returned his salute.

" I hear, my lady, master Nedward hath been taking a cold bath this evening. Egad ! 'twill be a warning to him not to be fishing for puppies in the Thames again. Poor Carlo ! Master Guy has composed a requiem and epitaph for him in dog—grel rhyme, which is so long that I have advised to cur—tail it, or he will send his hearers to sleep. The animal hath come safe to shore, though the water hath put it a little out o'breath ; for the want of which it is likely never to wag its tail again."

" Poor little creature ! " cried Matilda.

“Walter!” said the Baron, “the page is safe; but we have to thank a stranger for it. Dost thou remember the archer whose arrow wounded Sir Eustace de Mountfort?”

“Well, my lord, very well!”

“Dost thou know his name?”

“Yes, my lord, Arthur.”

“A friend of thine, perhaps?”

“So I call him, and he echoes it. But, in reality, I know but little of him; he lives in the forest, and I never knew him to speak to any one but myself during our acquaintance, excepting on that day at the fields, where he went solely to please me. But, by St. Mary! my lord, he’s the sorrowfullest man I ever knew, I verily believe he lives upon sighs; yet, I am sure he hath a good heart.”

“Perhaps, Walter, poverty may be the cause of his sorrow, and if any pecuniary aid ——”

“Pardon me, my lord, but I think he is rich; and though his appearance might justify the suspicion, he is no miser. He is—in fact, I never yet could discover who or what he is. Nothing will please him so much as being left alone; he hateth company, and, indeed, is so wedded to grief, that it is out of the power of man to divorce him, though I assure him gray heirs will be the only fruit of such an alliance.”

“Is it not possible we may be of some service to him, might we not alleviate his sorrows?” said Matilda.

“’Tis hopeless, I’m certain, my lady,” replied

Walter, " opposition will render him obstinate, and he'll die out of spite. When a man wishes to drown himself and is prevented, he is sure to hang himself up with his girdle on the first opportunity. Now I take it, my lord, his grief being but a bad habit, will soon wear threadbare, and in time, willy, nilly, it will quit him."

" Well then, Walter, if thou think'st 'tis so ; we will e'en wait till chance throws some opportunity in our way, whereby we may benefit him and evince our gratitude."

CHAPTER X.

I have read of bright embattled fields,
Of trophied helmets, spears, and shields,
Of chiefs, whose single arm could boast
Prowess to dissipate a host.

THE *fleur-de-lys* which Matilda received from her lover, had, indeed, been obtained by De Mountfort through his superior skill in the tourney; but the conquest had excited in two different breasts, two opposite, though equally dangerous, passions—love and hatred!

Although unwilling to engage in any of the frivolous amusements of the French court, Sir Eustace could not overcome his desire to enter the lists against the gallic knights, and he almost considered it a point of honour on his part to break a lance in honour of his native country; and this idea, seconded by the chivalrous spirit which warmed his gallant heart, determined him to make his appearance at the tournament; being persuaded that his absence from it would not by any means facilitate his departure, which he looked forward to with the greatest anxiety.

The wished-for day at length arrived, and the lists were filled at an early hour with knights and their attendants, in all the parade of polished steel and nodding plumes; the snorting and neighing steeds appeared by their pawing, capering, and curvetting, to desire the contest with an ardour, equal to that which inspired the breasts of their riders. All was in readiness, and they now only awaited the presence of the royal Philip, who soon arrived, and, amidst the loudest acclamations, took his seat on a superb throne, erected in a balcony which overlooked the yard; on either side were seated the various branches of the royal family, with their pages and ladies in waiting splendidly arrayed. Opposite to the King's was a similar balcony, in which, beneath a canopy of blue silk embroidered with silver, appeared the lovely Clotilde, Marquise de St. Clair, the most beautiful Lady of Philip's court, whose hand was destined to bestow the prize. Nor was there a single knight who entered the lists that day but would have considered himself blessed in receiving it from her fair hands, for all were deeply enamoured of her charms, and every heart beat high with anxious expectation, determined to strain every nerve in the contest. Each examined with the jealous eye of a rival the gorgeous harness and trapping\$ of the other, his strength and bearing; and every comparison was in favour of himself. Although the Marquise de St. Clair had barely attained the age of sixteen, she was now a widow; for her father had bestowed her hand

when only fourteen, on the Marquis de St. Clair, a man of fifty-six; a most unequal match, but the immense wealth which he possessed, and the considerable settlement which he made on Clotilde, induced the avaricious father to listen to his proposals, and they were speedily married, to the surprise of all the world, and the regret and sorrow of the bridegroom's expectant relatives. But before a twelve-month had elapsed, relentless death carried off the old Marquis, leaving Clotilde the wealthiest and loveliest widow in France, without experiencing the least sorrow to embitter the enjoyment of her riches. She had since received the most generous offers, but declined them all, and her heart seemed wholly impenetrable to the shafts of love. To gratify her father's avarice she had been forced to an alliance which was repugnant to her feelings, she was now mistress of her own actions, and she resolved never to marry again unless she could discover one who really loved her, and for whom her heart could feel a reciprocal tenderness. Possessed of the most angelic beauty, and every accomplishment to charm the heart, she was nevertheless haughty, proud, overbearing, and disdainful; yet envy was a stranger to her bosom, for she had too much vanity to suppose any woman could ever compare with her; and, perhaps, justly, for the most winning eloquence, sprightly wit, and good humour, were always at her command; in fine, she was endued with every grace to dazzle and delight.

Twelve pages in rich habits were the only attend-

ants on the Marquise, who was dressed in the eastern costume ; she wore a bright green silk velvet surcoat embroidered with gold, open at the bosom, and reaching to her knees, below which appeared her long white satin trowsers and red morocco boots ; a broad band of gold encircled her exquisitely-formed waist, in which she bore a richly jewelled poignard ; a crimson Cachemere shawl with golden fringes formed a turban for her head, her jetty and shining ringlets hanging loosely about her neck and shoulders, and a crimson silk vest was just visible beneath her surcoat.

On her appearance the King arose and bowed to the fair Marquise, who returned the royal salutation with a face decked in smiles, upon which loud acclamations and cries of “ *Vive la belle Clotilde,* ” from the gallants, were heard on every side.

The King having given the signal for the jousting to commence, the barriers were immediately thrown open, and a knight mounted on a bay charger galloped into the ring, and bowed to the King and the fair Clotilde. The herald announced Guillaume D’Arguemart. He was clad in a suit of steel without the least ornament or any plume in his helmet ; on his shield he bore “ *La Gloire* ” for his motto, surrounded with a laurel wreath. A young knight answered the challenge, and entering the ring, bowed gracefully to the King and all the ladies of the court, and then took his position. The housings of his milk-white steed were pink satin fringed with gold, and the

flowing mane and tail were decked with bows of the same colour; his armour was tinctured with an ethereal blue and embossed with golden flowers; a superb plume of white feathers overshadowed his elegant casque, and a scarf of pink silk was thrown tastefully across his shoulders. The gaiety of his dress, and the affected manner in which he carried his body, made him easily recognised by all as the gay Louis Marie de la Rosecœur. On his targe was painted a heart pierced with an arrow, with the words, “*La fléche d’amour perce tous les coeurs.*”

The knights couched their lances, and the charge was sounded. At the first course De la Rosecœur’s lance was shivered to pieces, whilst that of his antagonist, conducted by an unskilful hand, entered the neck of the former’s beautiful charger. The crimson blood poured forth, and the knight had the greatest difficulty in reining in his plunging steed, the pain of the wound causing the spirited animal to dash about the ring with the most ungovernable fury; but De la Rosecœur kept his seat with great firmness, till his squires came to his assistance and brought him another courser, which he quickly mounted, while they led away the other wounded and trembling animal. With impatience D’Arguemart awaited the second course; but the onset was unfavourable to him. The young knight bore him from the saddle, and he lay stretched upon the earth several yards from his steed. The loud and flattering plaudits rang welcome to the ears of the vain

De la Rosecœur; while the fallen knight, inwardly execrating his ill-fortune, was borne away by his attendants.

De la Rosecœur, then, with spear in rest, sat firmly in his saddle, bowing to the ladies, pleased with the conquest of such a valiant knight as Guillaume D'Arguemart, and fearing little from those who should follow and oppose him. André L'Orgueilleux next answered the challenge. He was of a tall slim figure, and wore a rich suit of brass armour of exquisite workmanship, with yellow plumes in his helm; the head and neck of his courser were likewise guarded with shell-work of brass. But in the first course L'Orgueilleux shared the fate of his predecessor. De la Rosecœur's heart beat tumultuously, for over several other opponents he was equally victorious: the prize seemed already within his grasp. Antonio Fiorenzi, an Italian knight, and an ardent admirer of the fair Clotilde, next appeared to put his skill to the proof. This knight was full six feet in height, and his large and muscular limbs were formed with the most perfect symmetry, his features were noble and peculiarly handsome, and his clear complexion almost too beautiful for a man. He was clad in a suit of highly polished steel, richly embossed, and his charger was completely covered with fine steel net-work, which sparkled like so many diamonds as he pranced gaily round the ring. De la Rosecœur had been too successful to feel the least inquietude at the opposition of this formidable rival, and he pushed boldly forward.

They were both equally ardent, and the shock was terrific, threatening destruction to both the combatants ; but they retired unarmed to measure their distance for another course, their spears alone having been shivered in the encounter. Fiorenzi was fresh and vigorous, but De la Rosecœur's exertions had considerably fatigued and weakened him, or most probably he would have soon vanquished the Italian ; but fortune decided against him, and he had the mortification to be unhorsed by the superior strength of his antagonist. His squires ran to his assistance, and raised him, when bowing politely to all around, the gallant knight quitted the ring amidst the plaudits of all, and there were few but pitied him in their hearts for the loss he had sustained after so valiantly contesting the prize.

Sir Eustace de Mountfort had witnessed De la Rosecœur's success and his overthrow, and burned with desire to attack Fiorenzi, and snatch the laurels from his brow, for he despised the crafty Italian as heartily as he admired his amiable adversary. Although the greatest fop in the French dominions, De la Rosecœur neither wanted good sense or courage ; and, since De Mountfort's residence in France, they had contracted a mutual friendship. The haughty Italian looked contemptuously on the English knight as he rode forward on his favourite Barbary ; and closing his vizor immediately couched his lance, and furiously spurred on his steed. De Mountfort was not less eager for the encounter than himself. But the charge

seemed equal, and neither were the least affected by the shock. They wheeled round, and ran two more courses, still without making the least impression. The Italian, exasperated at the firmness of De Mountfort, and his unsuccessful attempts to overthrow him, challenged him to dismount and to settle the contest with the sword ; and having obtained the King's permission, they bounded from the backs of their chargers, and delivering up their lances to their squires received their swords, and grasping them with a firm hand, they stood eyeing each other for a moment, till the trumpets sounded, and they commenced. Every stroke of Fiorenzi's struck sparks of fire from De Mountfort's blade ; but the Italian found that the English knight could handle the sword with equal skill and dexterity as the lance, and every stroke he made was skilfully parried. At length, breathless with the ardour of his attack, for Sir Eustace had merely stood on the defensive, he drew back, receiving in his turn the well-aimed blows of De Mountfort, whose sword several times struck his cuirass and rang upon his shoulders. Maddened with rage at his antagonist's superiority, he suddenly threw his whole body forward to make a thrust at De Mountfort, who nimbly jumping on one side, dexterously cut the feathers from his helm. It was impossible to resist from laughter at sight of the plumes which flew in all directions, and loud peals burst from every side. Wound up to the highest pitch of madness, Fiorenzi stamped, and grinding his teeth, muttered the bitterest execrations against the

knight, but his impetuosity was suddenly checked by a blow from his adversary's sword, which shattered his own short by the hilt. "Victoire ! victoire !" exclaimed a thousand tongues at once ; while the disappointed Fiorenzi gazed in dismay on the useless hilt, which he grasped in his hand.

Sir Eustace de Mountfort bowed gracefully to all around, then approaching the balcony where the King and royal family were seated, he saluted them, and thus addressed the monarch .—

"Sire, you are pleased to bestow on me the palm of victory ; but, pardon me, sire, if I decline the honour."

Every one who heard the knight utter these words, were struck with astonishment. Sir Eustace continued :—

"An Englishman never takes advantage of an accident to vanquish his adversary ; courage and skill, not chance, decide the victory with us !"

"Bravo ! Vive le genereux De Mountfort !" shouted every one, delighted and filled with admiration at his generosity. Fiorenzi acknowledged his courtesy with a slight inclination of the head, yet he was stung to the heart at the encomiums which were so loudly and lavishly bestowed on his brave and generous rival. Having provided himself with another sword, the charge sounded.

"Victory or death, Signor Cavaliero !" said the Italian, in an undertone.

"Strike !" replied De Mountfort, "a brave man

hath no fear of death!" and recommending himself to Heaven and his chaste mistress, he received Fiorenzi's assault. They both fought desperately, it was for life and death; and every fair one breathed a silent prayer for the safety of the gallant De Mountfort; whose sword presently pierced Fiorenzi's left shoulder, and the acute pain occasioning him to spring back several paces, Sir Eustace saw his advantage, pressed upon him, and at one jerk wrenched Fiorenzi's weapon from his hand, and cast it in the air. Exhausted with rage, excessive fatigue, and loss of blood, the vanquished Italian fell senseless to the earth.

This decided the victory in De Mountfort's favour; the barriers were immediately thrown open, and Fiorenzi's squires entered and bore away the almost lifeless body of their master.

De la Rosecoeur took De Mountfort by the hand as he was ascending the steps leading to the balcony, where the fair Clotilde was seated;

"My dear friend," said he, "I am heartily rejoiced at thy success, for nothing could have given me greater mortification than to have seen thee vanquished by that villainous Italian. But I detain thee; go. See la belle Marquise is eager to bestow the prize. Beware thy heart!"

Clotilde arose on his approach, casting down her eyes in the most languishing manner, while blushes flushed her lovely cheeks:

"Sir Knight!" said she, with a slight tremor, which added to the interest of the mellifluous and

ravishing tone of her voice ; “ accept the meed of thy valour,” putting the golden chain to which the fleur-de-lys was attached, around the neck of the kneeling knight ; “ and happy am I in having to bestow it on one whose generosity equals his bravery.”

“ Fair lady !” replied the gallant De Mountfort, rising and saluting the extended hand of the beautiful Marquise, “ thy approbation is far more estimable than all the honour I have gained in the encounter !”

Clotilde answered this compliment with a look which would have enchanted any other heart than De Mountfort’s, on whom all the winning tenderness and love it had intended to convey was lost or utterly disregarded ; for the image of Matilda was too deeply engraven on his heart to be effaced by the warmest regards even of the belle Marquise.

After Sir Eustace had received the prize, and been complimented by all his friends on his victory, although Philip was inwardly chagrined that an English knight should bear away the prize from his Frenchmen, he had the honour of leading Clotilde to the splendid banquet, which had been provided in a grand hall adjoining the tournament-yard. The politeness with which De Mountfort always addressed the Marquise was not at all agreeable to her wishes ; the language which she had received heretofore from every knight, was that of an enthusiastic lover, and now that such language would have met with a favourable reception, she had the mortification of perceiving even her advances were received with coldness. But the

courage, generosity, and manly beauty of the English knight had subdued her heart, and she endeavoured with the most winning smiles and prettiest airs to attract his attention, yet still Sir Eustace appeared cold and insensible.

The Marquise de St. Clair now experienced for the first time all the heart-rending bitterness of that frigid insensibility with which she had so often met the advances of others, and she retired from the banquet, her bosom agitated with the contending passions of pride and love. At one moment resolved to think no more of the cold-hearted Sir Eustace, and henceforth despise and forget him; then love would present the knight in all his excellence and worth, and in a moment break the cruel resolve. Tossed in a troubled sea of warring passions, she pressed her silken couch and wooed sweet sleep in vain.

Though apparently blind to her flattering partiality, De Mountfort was but too well aware of it, and wished more than ever to depart from France, lest the dangerous fascinations of the youthful widow should render him forgetful of his love and fealty to Fitz-Walter's daughter; yet the fear of such a weakness on his part was an injustice to Matilda, and he banished the idea from his mind.

CHAPTER XI.

—There's no jesting : there's laying on ; take't
Off who will, as they say : there be hacks !

Troilus and Cressida.

WHEN Antonio Fiorenzi recovered from his swoon, and learned the extent of his misfortunes, his rage exceeded all bounds ; he called down the bitterest curses on the head of the brave Sir Eustace, and vowed to avenge his disgrace. Upon inspecting his wound, the chirurgeon gave his opinion that there was little danger to be feared, and probably in a few days it would be entirely healed. During the time Fiorenzi was confined to his chamber, he brooded over his supposed wrongs, and revolved in his mind the most diabolical plans to satiate his revenge. He had been informed by his emissaries, whom he continually kept in his employ to watch the actions of the Marquise de St. Clair, of her extraordinary affability and condescension towards De Mountfort ; and this galling information added fresh fire to his rage, and he determined no longer to delay the execution of his designs. Pozzi, an Italian, and one of his minions, in the service of Clotilde, brought him intelligence that his mistress

had sent to request the company of Sir Eustace de Mountfort at her château in the evening, and his suspicions were aroused by the particular injunctions she had laid on her vassals not to admit any one but the knight. Fiorenzi closetted himself and his confidant, and in a long conference with the treacherous domestic, he imparted his intentions and arranged his plans, Pozzi promising to act in concert with, and aid him by all the facilities which his situation offered.

The unconscious De Mountfort had politely accepted the Marquise's invitation, little suspecting he was to be the sole visitor; or rather than have risked a tête-à-tête with Clotilde, he would have framed any excuse. The château was distant about half a league from his residence, and accompanied by only two of his suite, he set forth at rather an early hour, intending to enjoy the ride at his leisure. Absorbed in a delightful reverie, he threw the reins loosely over the neck of his Barbary, and crossing his arms on his breast, permitted his horse to walk at a slow pace. When in the midst of the wood, at the extremity of which stood the château de St. Clair, a shrill whistle attracted his attention, and seizing the reins, he turned round to his men.

“Didst thou hear that signal?” demanded he.

“Yes, Sir Knight,” replied one of them, “we both heard it, and fear it bodes no good.”

As he concluded, four men masked, with drawn swords, rushed from a thicket, and stood before De Mountfort's horse, so as effectually to prevent his

advancing. Perceiving by their appearance and manner that their intentions were inimical, he immediately drew his sword, his two faithful followers pushing forward and placing themselves on each side of him.

“ Frenchmen! instantly cease to obstruct my passage,” cried De Mountfort, in a resolute tone; “ or by St. George! ye shall repent this opposition.”

“ We are paid for our duty,” answered one of them, in a gruff tone with a strong provincial dialect, “ and we must perform it.”

“ What duty?”

“ Only a friend of thine wishes thy death!”

“ What? Assassins!” exclaimed De Mountfort; “ Vile and hardened wretches; do ye know whom ye address?”

“ Very well!” answered the man, in a cool and unconcerned manner; “ Thou art one of Sans Terre’s ambassadors to our Philip.”

“ Indeed! Is it so? Then receive the reward of thy infamy,” said Sir Eustace, charging them sword in hand.

Finding the horsemen were resolute in their defence, and determined to sell their lives dearly, one of the men drew a whistle from his pocket, and blowing it loudly, they were soon surrounded by a dozen more.

“ Keep close!” cried De Mountfort to his men, “ Charge briskly; strike forward, and our horses will soon bear us beyond the reach of their blades.”

Their situation was one of imminent danger, and desperately spurring on their horses, they threw down

all opposition. But their hopes of escape were destroyed by the appearance of six horsemen, who sallied upon them from the wood, and, who were evidently accomplices of the assassins by the warm manner in which the latter hailed them.

Retreat was impossible, resistance almost vain; for the men on foot were fast approaching to join their comrades.

“ My brave fellows !” said Sir Eustace, “ our fate is sealed ; but let us not shrink before these knaves. Remember we are Englishmen !”

And, like an angry lion surrounded by the hunters, he flew upon his foes, his eyes flashing fire and rolling and glancing round upon his enemies, who shrunk in terror from the mighty blows he dealt ; and, inspired by their master’s example, the two vassals fought as bravely, and doubtless would soon have overcome these mercenary cut-throats, who were already falling back, when their companions on foot came up to their aid.

“ Heaven protect thee, my dear master !” ejaculated one of the knight’s attendants, falling dead from his horse. But his murderer in a moment lay lifeless by his side by a stroke from De Mountfort’s sword, who still continued successfully to defend his life ; yet his strength, as well as that of his remaining vassal, was failing fast, and death seemed inevitable.

“ Hollo ! Down with the bloodhounds !” roared out a young man in a hunting habit, emerging from the wood, and galloping towards the combatants with twenty horsemen at his heels, all dressed in the same

fashion, and armed with boar-spears.—“Here’s foul play, by St. Dennis!” cried he.

The assailants were already reduced to sixteen, thirteen foot and three horsemen, and therefore were politic enough to beat a retreat on the appearance of this succour; but escape was not so easily effected as they imagined, and several of them fell beneath the well-aimed spears of the hunters.

“Holy Virgin!” exclaimed the hunter, riding up to the knight; “By my lady’s eyebrow! Sir Eustace de Mountfort!”

“De la Rosecœur!” said the rescued knight, recognising his features, and holding out his hand to him; “My right gallant friend! Preserver of my life! My gratitude as well as friendship is now thy due; but I will seek a fitter opportunity to thank thee. Good heavens! what being have I so deeply offended as to deserve death—a dishonourable death!”

“It is impossible! They must have mistaken thee for another!”

“Nay, my friend! they knew me full well; they even avowed as much.”

“Indeed? Then by the velvet lip of fair Clotilde, Eustace! I verily believe that black-eyed Italian, that agent of Satan, Fiorenzi, is the instigator of this affair. I hate suspicion, but I know the man, he alone is capable of such a damnable conspiracy.”

“It may be so,” replied De Mountfort; “Fiorenzi is a desperate man; but I will, in future, guard against his machinations; and if he prove the secret and

cowardly enemy who aims at my life, I will cite him before King Philip and demand honourable satisfaction. We shall then discover the truth of our suspicions ; his passions are too unruly to be under the command of reason, and they will blaze out in spite of his endeavours."

" True, and we shall discover him by the light. But, in the meanwhile, whither art thou going ?"

" To visit the Marquise de St. Clair."

" How ?"

" By her own invitation !"

" I'm surprised ! Art thou really serious ?" inquired De la Rosecœur anxiously, and receiving the knight's answer in the affirmative with a very melancholy countenance.

" By St. Dennis, Eustace ! thou art truly fortunate in gaining her favour."

" By mine honour, De la Rosecœur, I assure thee I am nowise flattered by her condescension."

" No ?"

" No !" reiterated De Mountfort, " I have already sworn fealty to one of Britain's fairest daughters."

" Hast thou ? Give me thy hand !" cried the gallant, eagerly ; " I breathe again. I would rather have thee for a friend than a rival. And now, let us no longer remain conversing here, but onward to the château, where I will accompany thee. By our lady ! thy sword hath done a little execution here," said he, looking at the dead bodies which lay stretched upon

the ground ; “ thou hast provided a rare feast of carrion for the crows !”

“ Yes !” replied De Mountfort, “ they have paid dearly for their temerity. But among the slain I have to mourn the loss of one of my followers, a brave fellow !—Robert,” added he, turning to the vassal, “ place the body of thy fallen comrade on his horse ; return to the palace, and see him immediately interred ; and give this purse of marks to Father Adrien for masses for his soul. The Chevalier de la Rosecœur will permit ten of his men to accompany thee for a safeguard.”

“ And shall I return for your Excellency ?”

De Mountfort replied in the negative ; but commanded the faithful fellow to send his captain, Fitz-Arnulph, with an escort of twenty men, early in the morn, as he intended remaining that night at De la Rosecœur’s château, which was situated a short distance from the Marquise’s. The two friends, accompanied by the remaining attendants, pursued their way in delightful converse, and soon reached the Château de St. Clair.

Clotilde was deeply chagrined when the arrival of De la Rosecœur was announced with that of De Mountfort, yet she received them with the greatest politeness and the most winning suavity, and immediately ordered some choice refreshments to be served up, entering in the meanwhile into an agreeable and spirited conversation with the two knights ; during

which, Sir Eustace, by way of apology for his apparent rudeness, in bringing De la Rosecœur with him, informed her of what had passed in the wood, the recital of which caused her tears to flow, lauding the prompt assistance, and the fortunate rescue of his life, which he owed to his valiant friend.

Her heart felt the sincerest gratitude for the preservation of her beloved Sir Eustace, and she bestowed the most flattering encomiums on the enamoured De la Rosecœur, at which he was not more gratified than his friend ; who hoped, from her marked attention, she might, when acquainted with his engagements, consign the love she bore him to one who would, he was convinced, return her passion with the truest affection. As she did not even hint at the reason of her invitation, De Mountfort supposed she wished De la Rosecœur to believe his visit was merely accidental ; but he could easily divine that, whatever was her purpose, she had intended to have received him alone, and he was rejoiced at the accident which had thrown De la Rosecœur in his way. The Marquise's elegant dress was worn with studied negligence and ease, exhibiting the fine proportions of her figure to the greatest advantage, and her jetty and flowing hair was arranged in the most becoming manner, and the enchanted De la Rosecœur listened with enthusiastic delight to the engaging accents of her tongue. As previously concerted between the friends, De la Rosecœur introduced the subject of the late tournament,

than which nothing could be more agreeable to the Marquise, and she observed:—

“ I really thought after thou hadst overcome Guillaume D’Arguemart and André l’Orgueilieux, the prize would have been borne away by thee, De la Rosecœur.”

“ I was vain enough to think so too, Madame,” replied the knight, “ but I was more fortunate in being vanquished by Signor Antonio Fiorenzi, than in vanquishing him to have been obliged to oppose my good friend Sir Eustace.”

“ A very generous avowal, and worthy so gallant a knight as Louis Marie De la Rosecœur!” said the Marquise.

“ ‘Tis not the first time, Madame, my friend hath expressed such generous sentiments, nor the first by many that he hath acted so,” added De Mountfort.

“ Nay, Madame! your Excellency! spare me; my moustache is curling with the heat of my blushes. Indeed, now, I was very interested in my assertion, for De Mountfort would most certainly have lifted me over the barrier, and I should probably have had the mortification of being caught in the tabards of my own heralds; whereas, Signor Fiorenzi merely pushed me gently over the crupper of my steed, crushing all the sweet hopes I had formed of receiving the prize from this lily hand!” at the same time raising it to his lips and saluting it.

“ What an apology! What excellent manœuvring!

And then such a very flattering conclusion!" exclaimed the Marquise, laughing; " thy courtesy certainly outstrips all attempts at equality!"

" Truly, Madame; but the superiority of thine is even above that equality."

" Does your Excellency hear him? There is no tangible part but what he defends it, parrying all one's thrusts."

" Pardon me, Madame, my heart is not invulnerable, and a bright glance of thine eye hath already pierced it, thrown off its guard by the honeyed sweetness of thy tongue!"

" I yield—I yield!" cried the Marquise; " it is in vain to contend with thee longer, unless your Excellency will lend your aid?"

" As a true knight, Madame, in every danger I will fly to thy succour; but I am confident even the speech of De la Rosecœur is inadequate to thy just praise, and——"

" A conspiracy—I now perceive it all;" exclaimed the lively Clotilde, " ye are accomplices; and because I am a woman, forsooth, thou dost imagine my tongue must bear me through; but female eloquence is soon silenced by such insinuating flattery."

" Nay, I vow, ma belle Marquise, I am innocent!" said De Mountfort, falling on one knee before the lady, and laying his hand on his heart.

" Swear it on the *fleur-de-lys*!" cried De la Rosecœur, " and by that token the Marquise will give credence to thy oath! What, wilt thou not? Now,

behold his confusion, Madame. He is guilty! Annihilate him with a frown!"

"Nay, by St. George, I have it not!" exclaimed De Mountfort, rising; "by this time, perhaps, it is in England."

"In England!" said De la Rosecœur, "and wherefore didst thou part with such a precious jewel?"

"I have despatched a trusty servant to deliver it to—"

"To whom?" cried De la Rosecœur, with well-feigned earnestness, and

"To whom?" echoed the Marquise with earnestness, yet dreading his reply.

"To Lady Matilda Fitz-Walter!"

This confession completely overcame Clotilde, and it was utterly impossible for her to conceal her agitation.

"I—I—am not—no, not in the least surprised, that the lady—that your Excellency—should have thus disposed of the prize—which I had the pleasure—which thy valour gained.—I—I am rather gratified—indeed I am!"

Sir Eustace bowed, and resumed his seat; while De la Rosecœur endeavoured by his ready wit to disperse the gloom which this occurrence had visibly cast over the beautiful widow; but all his attempts to restore her sprightliness and animation were fruitless, and after a quarter of an hour's desultory and forced conversation, De Mountfort and his friend rose and retired. And happy was the Marquise de St. Clair to

be left alone to ruminate upon her hopeless passion for the handsome Englishman.

“ By St. Dennis ! the Marquise loves thee, Eustace ; every word she addressed to thee evinced her affection, and her subsequent agitation hath convinced me of the truth of my suspicions ;” said De la Rosecœur to his friend, when they were without the gates of Clotilde’s château.

“ De la Rosecœur,” replied Sir Eustace, “ I know not what the Marquise’s sentiments may be towards me ; but if she hath really any esteem or love for me, the avowal of my previous engagement with another lady will effectually stifle the flame. Seize this opportunity, my friend ; see her often. Pay her all those delicate attentions thou art master of, and her tender heart will soon yield to a new impression when she finds the one she cherishes is hopeless !”

“ Notwithstanding the kind hopes thou giv’st me, Eustace, I fear a repulse,” replied the young knight, sighing ; “ she is not at all of a fickle disposition ; although, perhaps, compared with the English ladies, who are, as I hear, extremely coy and modest in their demeanour, the Marquise’s freedom of conversation and manners, may give her, in thy eyes the appearance of levity. But regard her as a French-woman and a widow, and thou wilt admire that which at present displeases thee. In fine, she is young, rich, and beautiful, and I love her to distraction !”

CHAPTER XII.

King Rich. Know'st thou not any, whom corrupting gold
Would tempt unto a close exploit of death?

Page. I know a discontented gentleman—

THE frustration of his designs by the interposition of the Barons, rather increased than diminished the King's desire of getting Fitz-Walter's daughter in his power; yet he was aware that the Baron would be too well guarded at present for any immediate attempt; and he proposed to let a period elapse, in which he would be again lulled into an enjoyment of imaginary security, and then suddenly, like an overwhelming torrent, pour in his forces on all sides, raze his castle to the ground, and bear away the Lady Matilda.

Such were the tyrannical intentions of King John towards the most faithful of his adherents; the truest subject of his realm; whom, for the gratification of a lawless passion, he was about to sacrifice. But John was never remarkable for tenderness of conscience, or the possession of any sentiments of gratitude; and

laws, human and divine, were alike indifferent to him when they opposed his inclinations.

On retreating from London, after his contemptible apology to the Barons, John returned to Brackley; but the uneasiness of mind which he suffered during the week the Barons remained at Castle Baynard, is more easily to be conceived than described. His desire could brook no delay, and therefore the hour he received intelligence of their departure, he set off for London in disguise, accompanied by a few attendants in whom he thought he could repose confidence and secrecy, resolved to invest no one with the honourable office of a spy, but with his own eyes watch the movements of those with whom he intended shortly to contend. In the garbs of foreign merchants they passed unnoticed and without suspicion in the populous and commercial city of London, and conversed familiarly with all, endeavouring always to turn the conversation to the topic with which their minds were particularly engaged; but they learnt little more than they were already in possession of, John having the disagreeable necessity of listening repeatedly to the severest strictures and most mortifying remarks on his arbitrary conduct from the mouths of many of the justly indignant citizens, who handled him in the most unceremonious manner, at the same time praising the good Fitz-Walter to the skies, and vowing they would risk their fortunes and their lives in his defence. To one less ardent than John, these honest and undisguised sentiments of the citizens would have

been a warning to relinquish his intentions and retire ; but, on the contrary, the more difficulties that were thrown in his way, the more desirous he became of carrying his point. Every evening, at an appointed hour, his emissaries assembled at a certain place and imparted the information they had obtained during the day. On the fourth, when they had all communicated their gleanings, John, scrutinizing their countenances with eyes that seemed to read their passing thoughts, his ears eagerly devouring their words, expecting every moment to catch some sound favourable to his wishes ; but finding, when they had concluded, it was a mere repetition of the preceding evening's unimportant intelligence, he arose from his seat, impatiently exclaiming “ Pish ! ” and paced the apartment for several seconds, with his arms folded, and muttering to himself. Presently recollecting himself, he waved his hand, and sharply bid them retire ; a mandate they readily obeyed, for they knew from experience the King would vent his anger upon any one, however innocent of the cause, who should be unfortunate enough to be within his reach ; and, therefore, making their obeisance, they quickly departed, lest he should momentarily change his mind and command them to remain.

The following morning the King was walking on the skirts of the forest, concerting with Arnold, one of his followers, the probable means of gaining admission to Castle Baynard, that they might learn the real state of the Baron's supplies, and whether he was in reality

prepared for any sudden attack ; for all their endeavours to obtain intelligence of the present feelings or number of the inmates of the castle had proved fruitless ; although, from the secrecy which prevailed, they naturally supposed Fitz-Walter was on his guard.

“ Arnold !” said the King, resting his hand upon his companion’s shoulder, “ if we fail in our attempt, although we place too much reliance on this traitor’s hospitality to doubt he will give admittance to a traveller and a foreigner, which thou shalt represent, we will then devise other and stronger means.— Yes—” then suddenly relapsing into deep thought, he remained silent for a few moments.

“ Pardon me, your Grace, for interrupting your meditations,” said Arnold, “ but here comes one of Fitz-Walter’s archers.”

“ Art certain ?” demanded the King.

“ Certain, your Grace !”

“ We will interrogate him then, Arnold ; see, he approaches ; peradventure we may obtain—”

“ A fine morning, gentlemen !” said the archer, joining them.

“ Good Morrow, soldier ; for such we hold thee by thy habiliments to be,” replied John, returning his salute.

“ Hold, there ! thou’rt right ;” said Walter, (for it was no other than he, who now filled the honourable station of Captain of the archers)—“ Now, by the cut of thy garment, I should take thee for a merchant.”

“ And me ?” demanded Arnold.

“ Of the same breed, truly !” replied Walter jocosely, eyeing him from top to toe.

“ Just !” said the King. “ Prithee, friend, what news is there abroad ? What topics do gossips’ tongues discuss ? For being strangers here, we should be glad to learn what’s passing in the city.”

“ Of news abroad, my budget is but little worth ; if a piece of homely intelligence will suit thee, thou’lt find me an oracle. Thou must know I have the honour of being Captain of archers to the noble Baron Fitz-Walter——”

“ Fitz—Fitz-Walter !” said Arnold, pretending to recollect having heard the name ; “ What ? of Montfichet ?”

“ No, no,” replied Walter, “ of Castle Baynard. What, and hast thou never heard of his peerless daughter, Matilda the Fair ?”

The King and Arnold shook their heads, with an expression of countenance denoting vast indifference concerning the maid ; at the same time John was inwardly delighted to have met with such a garrulous subject, and expected to reap much benefit from his communications.

“ Then hast thou never heard of the most beautiful creature the hand of heaven ever formed !” rejoined Walter.

“ Doth she ever appear in public ?” asked the King.

“ She was wont to do so ; but, at present, my Lord thinks it advisable to keep the lamb within the fold.”

“ For fear of the wolves, I suppose ?” said Arnold.

“ The wolves ! Egad ! gentlemen, no. To keep her from the jaws of the royal lion.”

“ The King, dost thou mean ?” demanded John.

“ Ay, even so,” replied Walter ; “ the King saw her once, fell in love with her, and because Baron Fitz-Walter courageously spurned his dishonourable offers, for which, among friends be it said, his Grace deserved to be kicked from the castle.” Arnold looked significantly at the King, who turned pale with rage, and bit his lips ; but Walter continued without observing the change in the countenances of his hearers :—“ And so, forsooth, finding he could not gain her by persuasion, he had recourse to force of arms ; but foregad, Sir !” exclaimed he, slapping John on the shoulder, “ we sent him off with a flea in his ear. In short, the Barons arriving in the midst of the fray, Lackland——”

“ Lackland !” uttered the King, surprised, and frowning with vexation.

“ Yes, Lackland ; a nickname they give the King. But thou’rt a stranger, and therefore this may appear strange ; however, as I said, the Barons arrived ; the King, who is not the bravest man in England, after making a sneaking sort of an apology, decamped bag and baggage. Ha ! ha ! ha ! I’faith a most excellent joke !”

However, neither John nor his companion Arnold appeared to acquiesce in the truth of Walter’s conclusion, but both, and more especially the King, were

stung to the quick ; yet fearful of awakening his suspicion by expressing their sentiments, and of perhaps discovering themselves, they smothered their feelings with the best possible grace, and endeavoured at least to appear gratified with his narration.

“ Very good,” said the King ; “ and no doubt thou wert highly amused at his discomfiture ?”

“ In verity was I, for two reasons. Firstly, I had the pleasure of serving the King’s knaves according to their deserts, and I dealt very honestly with them too ! Secondly, I have now the honour of serving the Baron Fitz-Walter according to his deserts, that is with heart and hand !”

“ And, no doubt, the Baron values thy services,” said Arnold.

“ More than they merit—as he does that of all those who serve him ; and they are not a few, I assure ye, gentlemen.”

“ Then the King had better give up the pursuit, thou think’st ?” said John.

“ Give up the pursuit ?” exclaimed Walter, looking suspiciously on the King and his companion ; “ I did not say the King was pursuing her.”

“ Nay,” replied John calmly, recollecting himself, “ but I—I merely thought, as John is of such a disposition as thou hast described, that it would be no easy matter to thwart his intentions—merely an inference from what I have heard of his character.”

“ Thou’rt right ; and, in truth, though I did not say as much, we do know he is secretly working to obtain

his end. But we are prepared, and know every movement of his so well, that I could lay my finger on him——”

“Indeed!” interrupted the King, looking steadfastly upon him, and endeavouring to read his thoughts in his open and honest countenance; “then thou know’st he is near?”

“Certes; Lord bless thee! An’ the Baron were to say, I know the King is concealed within the city walls——”

“Within the city walls!” echoed Arnold, almost involuntarily; but Walter continued without regarding his exclamation, “He hath a design upon me and mine; and therefore, my brave fellows, unkennel the fox! Half an hour would not pass ere the King would be discovered, and uncovered too, to his shame! But I must bid ye good by’z, gentlemen, and budge, for I have affairs of consequence on hand.”

And away he went chanting a satirical ballad which Guy had composed on the King’s discomfiture, and which was well understood by John and his companion; nor was it the first time they had heard it repeated.

“What thinks your Grace of this odd man and his intelligence?” said Arnold, in a tone which plainly convinced the King his own thoughts of Walter were far from favourable.

“We think, Arnold, some traitor hath revealed to Fitz-Walter our coming hither—it must be so; this babbler else hath more cunning than we wot of, and,

perchance, suspecting we may be spies, hath spoken this to mislead or intimidate us ; or—no matter if it be or not. Go, thou, to where our troops lie hid, and bid them on to London with good speed ; marching by night that no human eye by chance may see and guess their purpose. Surprise is the only way we may hope to seize this traitor ; who, knowing his own guilt, will not let caution wink. But onward, Arnold, lose not a moment in delay ; be diligent and true!"

When his emissary had departed, the King returned to his lodgings in the city, determined to wander about no more during the day : for the conversation which had passed with Walter created, if not alarm, at least a harassing perplexity in his breast ; and therefore he judged concealment would be most advisable at present, and he was the more inclined to this when he considered how vain had been all his endeavours, and those of his minions, to obtain any particulars concerning the situation and feelings of Baron Fitz-Walter and his vassals.

Although Walter had spoken so much truth, it was partly accidental, and the effect of his waggish disposition ; and the love he bore the Baron always inciting him to make him appear to the greatest advantage in the eyes of strangers, and having every reason to suppose the King had not entirely given up his wicked intentions, he was always on his guard when speaking of him, though he was certainly ignorant, as well as the Baron, that John was lurking in disguise so near them ; yet, notwithstanding the goodness of his inten-

tions, in this instance it was only the means of spurring on the King to an earlier attempt.

John, having remained in his chamber till the close of day, took a ramble in the forest, where, having met his men, and giving them his orders how to act to prevent discovery, bid them await him in a certain place, and proceeded alone into the forest under shadow of the trees, for the moon was shining bright and clear, and the sky was beautifully serene. Hope and fear alternately reigned in his breast, as he revolved in his mind, his present chance of success and the remembrance of his former failure and disgraceful retreat; but for the Barons he would then have been victorious, and they, he knew, were at present safe in their own territories, and a single blow struck unexpectedly might now decide in his favour; he cared little for the consequences which might ensue, aware, that by presenting Fitz-Walter's possessions to the most powerful of the Barons, he would effectually secure him in his favour, and the rest would be silenced either through fear or incapacity. John, absorbed in these thoughts, had wandered a considerable way into the forest, when the voice of some person speaking drew his attention to the spot whence it proceeded; and, approaching softly, he saw a man sitting on a bank beneath the shadow of a spreading oak.

“ O woman, thou choicest gift that kind heaven hath bestowed on man!” exclaimed he audibly, “ how beautiful thou art; what winning and soothing language dost thou breathe; or, when thy tongue is

silent, what heavenly language is in thine eye ; what ease, and grace, and rare perfection in thy angelic form ; and when thou art tripping in the merry dance, there is more music in thy airy footsteps than in the dulcet notes of the silver lute, making the youthful heart bound high with love and joy ; in fine, thou'rt a rich casket full of every excellence !”

“ By St. George ! an enamoured swain sighing out his soul in amorous rhapsodies to the sickly moon !” thought John, as he listened to his eulogy.

“ Oh ! why,” he continued, “ did heaven bestow such precious gifts on thee, and yet leave thy breast open to the allurements of vanity—the curse of loneliness and the destruction of virtue. Vanity ! from my heart I curse thee, thou art the fiend who has robbed me of all earthly felicity ; blighting with thy pestiferous breath the fairest flower that ever bloomed in nature’s garden, depriving me of my mistress, nay, almost my bride. Oh, Isabelle, once loved Isabelle, how cruelly was I deceived when I thought I had gained thy love. What treacherous smiles were those that played upon thy lips wooing the heart to love and sorrow. But let not memory recal thy angelic form, lest I become enamour’d of the image, and love and be again deceived by the sweet delusion. No ! my fancy shall paint thee in all the camelion hues of fickleness and duplicity, calling up a spectre of such vile deformity, that my hair will stand on end, looking on the horrid vision of imagination !”

Here the violence of his feelings seemed to subdue

his utterance, and for a few moments he remained silent. The King's curiosity was aroused, and he kept his station, not daring to move a step lest he should disturb the speaker, who presently commenced his soliloquy again.

“ My heart is blighted—broken—withered; and, alas! this world is to me a wilderness: but for thee, Isabelle, it might have proved a paradise, and for thy sake I'll hate all womankind !”

“ Jealousy, jealousy !” thought John, “ is the cause of all this anguish. Now, by the mass! we will mould him to our purpose—a most excellent subject! a rare tool !” and thereupon instantly putting aside the bushes which had concealed him, he stood before the stranger.

“ Who is it intrudes upon my sorrow ?” cried Arthur, for it was the melancholy archer himself, rising and approaching the King.

“ One who hath sorrows too—a kindred sorrow to thine own !” replied John, “ Give me thy hand, I join thee in thy oath to hate all womankind !”

“ Is there another being then on earth so miserable ?” said Arthur.

“ Ay, indeed; she whom I dearly loved, and who once regarded me with an eye of favour, now loves another.”

“ Is it possible ? Then take my hand; the similarity of our griefs doth make us mournful friends !”

“ Friends ! And may I call thee friend ? Then pleasing hope returns to cheer my heart.”

“ And is there hope in sorrow such as ours ? Oh, teach me where to find it, that I may feast my soul on’t but for one hour, and I shall depart this wretched world in peace.”

“ My hope is in revenge ; she who hath proved faithless to her vows must die ! Nay, start not ! Is there such horror in the sound ? Can’t thou pity the woman who is pitiless ; whose heart is cruel as she’s fair, and who delights in heaping misery on one who truly loved her ? ”

“ Nay, I despise her and pity thee ; but who is the fickle fair one, the prototype of—— ”

“ Matilda the Fair, Baron Fitz-Walter’s daughter ! ”

“ Good heavens ! ” ejaculated Arthur, clasping his hands together and looking upwards to the dark-blue sky, his lips moving as if uttering some silent prayer.

The moon was shining full upon them, and John distinctly beheld every movement of Arthur’s countenance.

“ Thou know’st her, then, doubtless ; ” said the King.

“ I do, ” replied Arthur, “ and could ne’er believe her capable of such baseness. If she be guilty, I should not feel the least compunction in sheathing my dagger—— ”

“ Would’st thou not ? ” interrupted John eagerly, grasping his hand, “ This friendly feeling in my cause doth bind me firmly to thee—and wilt thou ” looking at the archer in a doubtful and hesitative manner, “ undertake this deed of vengeance ? Say—speak ! ”

“ I will.”

“ Nay, swear !”

“ I swear by all my hopes of happiness, by the holy and immaculate Virgin, I will execute justice on Matilda the Fair, and——”

“ I am satisfied. I see thy heart is in the cause. Tell me how shall I reward thee ? Art thou poor ?”

“ As he who hath lost all that can make him rich can be. Nay, keep thy purse ; hereafter when we meet thou shalt reward me ; to-morrow at sunset I will gain admittance to the castle, and then—what arm shall have power to oppose me ?”

“ But how wilt thou obtain audience of Matilda at so late an hour ?”

“ Is not Sir Eustace de Mountfort thy favour'd rival ?”

“ True, but what avails——”

“ I will pretend I bring intelligence from him which I would pour into her private ear—when we are alone, I will execute my purpose, and before the castle is alarmed I will make good my retreat to the forest, where thou shalt await me at an appointed place with a steed that will swiftly bear me beyond the reach of the Baron's vengeance !”

The ardour with which Arthur undertook this daring enterprise called forth the most cordial professions of friendship and service from the King, whose cruel disposition delighted in the idea of depriving another of that treasure he could never hope to enjoy.

CHAPTER XIII.

— The vows of women
 Of no more bondage be, to where they are made,
 Than they are to their virtues; which is nothing:—
 O! above measure false!

Cymbeline.

WHEN the wind blows
 Let a man wear his cloak—
 When the wine flows,
 Let a man his clay soak.
 Hey nonny, ho nonny !

When the sun shines
 We should always make hay—
 When a maid smiles,
 Lord, what man would cry ' Nay.'
 Hey nonny, ho nonny !

Banish thy cares
 And lean sorrow defy—
 'Stead of weak tears
 Have a *drop in thine eye*!
 Hey nonny, ho nonny !

Thus sang the Lord of misrule; and the hall rang with shouts of applause, for they were all in a right merry mood, and frolic and laughter were the order of the feast, led by Guy and his jocose friend and rival wit, Walter.

“ Now, boys, one cup more !” quoth old Ambrose, filling a bumper, his twinkling eyes and heated cheeks exhibiting evident proofs of his being very comfortable ; “ and do thou give us a tune, Jaques, and—what—why—hath the boy gone ?” said he, turning round and staring at the vacant seat which the Frenchman had occupied.

“ Ay, in verity hath he, good master Ambrose !” replied Walter, who was seated at the other extremity of the table, “ the juice o’the grape hath warmed his gay heart ; and, doubtless, being in high spirits, he hath gone to whine a pretty tale of love in the ear of mistress Maude ; his advantage at present appearing double in his eyes, he considers himself two to one.”

“ An she be *won* by his eloquence, she’ll be his equal *too*, being already *one* by herself,” said Guy.

“ Notwithstanding we make so much of them, I dare to say they both wish to be one,” replied Walter, determined to have the last word.

“ By my fay !” exclaimed Guy, “ when I bring bread, thou always bring’st wine to the feast. I’m at my wits end, and——”

The Fool was here interrupted by the entrance of one of the guard, who informed Walter that a person at the wicket wished to speak with him, and whom he immediately followed. But how great was his surprise when he recognised his friend the archer.

“ Welcome, Arthur !” said he, shaking him cordially by the hand, “ I’m glad to see thee. In what can I serve thee—come in ; a cup of good wine will

do thee good this raw evening, and I am sure the Baron will be rejoiced to see thee."

" 'Tis to him, Walter, I come, and would speak with him speedily."

" And so thou shalt. Dost see the light streaming from yon casement ? There sits the good Baron with his sweet daughter, my Lady Matilda. Hark ! Dost thou not hear the sound of her harp ?"

" Innocent creature!" exclaimed Arthur, " how little doth she dream of the danger that is nigh."

" Danger ! What meanest thou, Arthur ?" said Walter, grasping the archer firmly by the arm, " Who dare harm her, and who can, while safe within these castle walls, and guarded by those who will sacrifice their lives in her defence ? Tell me what thou know'st !"

" First let me see the Baron, and —— What, dost thou hesitate ?" said he turning to Walter, who seemed wavering and half inclined to deny him his request ; for although he had been long acquainted with Arthur, and believed him to be a friend, he knew nothing of his disposition towards the Baron. He might be an enemy ! There had always been an impenetrable mystery about him and a misanthropic feeling, the cause of which he could never discover, and therefore this suspicion was pardonable.

" Arthur !" replied he, after a moment's pause, " if thou art really a friend thou wilt pardon my hesitation, thou must be aware of the cause. Before I lead thee to the Baron, I must gain his permission—remain

here till my return ;" and he hastened away, ere Arthur could reply. The latter, with his arms folded, slowly and silently paced the court, his eyes fixed on the window whence the sound of the harp proceeded ; it ceased, however, almost immediately after Walter quitted him, and he imagined he was now delivering the request to the Baron, and nothing was heard save loud peals of laughter issuing from the merry vassals in the hall.

Walter soon joined the archer again, and having communicated to him not only the acquiescence of Fitz-Walter, but his particular desire to see him, instantly led the way to the apartment where Baron Fitz-Walter was sitting with the fair Matilda, who both arose on his entrance and returned his courteous salute."

" To what am I to attribute this visit ?" said Fitz-Walter.

" To chance, my Lord," replied the archer.

" A happy chance to throw one in our way to whom we are so much indebted."

" Thou dost prize my services too high, my Lord. Providence made me the instrument of its mercy, and directed my willing hand to save thy page. And, can'st thou credit me ? I come now to save the Lady Matilda but from a more cruel death. Thou art astonished—'tis too true—I will not hold thee in suspense, time presses, and I must be brief. How wilt thou be surprised to hear I am employed by the King to murder her !"

Fitz-Walter stared with breathless astonishment upon Arthur at this abrupt confession, and Matilda's cheeks grew deadly pale.

Walter, who alone retained the use of his speech demanded of Arthur where he had seen the King; when he gave him a succinct description of the affair.

"And although," continued Arthur, "the King was so closely disguised, I discovered him by several peculiar phrases which he is wont to use; and, indeed, the moment he mentioned Sir Eustace and my Lady Matilda's name, I was convinced my suspicions were well founded!"

"In what fashion was he disguised?" said the Baron.

"After the manner of the foreign merchants——"

"In verity then," interrupted Walter, "I met him and his companion in the forest yestermorn; I thought them very curious in their questions, and put them off with some pretty stories of my own invention."

After the Baron had conversed some time with the archer, he bade Walter see the guard doubled, and every precaution taken to prevent surprise during the night.

"I must now beg the favour of a lodgment within thy hospitable castle, my Lord," said Arthur, "till I can procure a passage to France. I have friends at Angiers to whom I will fly; for death is inevitable if I remain in England."

"We will cheerfully grant such a trifling request, good Sir;" replied the Baron, "but yet we sincerely

hope thou wilt not quit us so suddenly, here thou shalt receive every attention and comfort that friendship and gratitude can offer."

"And let me add my entreaties to those of my dear father!" said Matilda, in the most winning manner.

"Fair Lady!" answered the Archer, taking her hand respectfully—"I must confess, thy flattering kindness doth incline me to accept the offer."

"And wilt thou, then?" interrupted she, earnestly.

"Nay, Lady, I cannot; the King will be exasperated at my duplicity in this affair, although I have only fulfilled my vow, by protecting thee, for that is justice, and he demanded no more; he will pursue me with unrelenting vengeance, and can I think of drawing fresh danger upon thee and thy noble father by remaining under his roof?"

"Oh! rather say, dear Sir, thy presence would ensure us greater safety!"

"Sweet Lady," exclaimed the Archer, his melancholy countenance brightening with admiration, and entirely thrown off his guard by tenderness—"How much dost thou resemble thy departed mother!"

"Her mother!" ejaculated Fitz-Walter, gazing with astonishment upon Arthur, whom this exclamation immediately recalled to his recollection. The earnest and inquiring looks of Matilda and the Baron demanded an explanation, and he continued:

"I—I do not wonder at thy surprise, my Lord; at my involuntary expressions. I am,—it is useless any

longer to conceal from thee,—thy unhappy friend De Cliffordre!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Baron, embracing him with emotion—"Is it possible; do I again behold thee. Yes; I know thee now; but, disguised in such mean attire, how could I expect to meet the gay and gallant Sir Arthur de Cliffordre. Whence ariseth all this melancholy; thy voluntary alienation from society, of which Walter hath informed me? But eager as I am to learn the cause of thy misfortunes, I cannot allow thee to commence, ere thou takest somewhat to recruit thy strength."

And, introducing De Cliffordre to Matilda, who was not less surprised than gratified at her father's recognition of a particular friend in the person of her preserver, the Baron gave orders for refreshments and wine to be immediately served up. At the conclusion of the evening's repast, and after having dismissed the attendants, Sir Arthur de Cliffordre related his misfortunes to the Baron and his daughter, whose tender and sympathizing heart often melted into tears during the narration.

The Baron first became acquainted with Sir Arthur at a grand tourney in France, where the English and French Kings met, attended by all the flower of their knights and nobility; and among others of his countrymen, De Cliffordre signalized himself on that occasion. He was at that time, perhaps, without exception, the most eloquent and accomplished of the

English knights ; his armour and accoutrements, and the trappings of his horses, were always remarkable for their richness and fancy ; and, although possessed of the most undaunted courage, and an excellent and amiable disposition, he had also a tincture of vanity in his composition, which was probably the reason his heart had remained so long invulnerable to the shafts of love ; for he had sighed when a fair one favoured him with a tender glance, and toyed and talked of love he never felt, and all their tenderness or coquetry proved abortive, for it merely gratified his vanity without creating a reciprocal passion. However, soon after the departure of Baron Fitz-Walter and his Lady for England, with both of whom he was on terms of the most friendly intimacy, De Clifford met the charming Isabelle, and, for the first time, experienced the vacillating pangs and pleasures of love. He was of too ardent and impetuous a disposition to wait the Lady's smiles to prompt him on to plead his cause, but he now became as humble as before he had been vain, and he endeavoured, by the most indefatigable attention and gallantry, to win the affections of Isabelle ; and it may be readily supposed, that one so highly gifted as De Clifford, was irresistible, when he exerted those agreeable qualities and pleasing manners which he possessed in so eminent a degree ; and the youthful Isabelle, for she had scarcely attained her sixteenth year, soon rejoiced his heart by the favourable and flattering attention she paid to him whenever he addressed her ; and her confusion and

blushes plainly convinced him he had, at least, gained her esteem. Although reprehensible in endeavouring to gain Isabelle without the sanction of her relatives, yet De Clifforde was too proud to demand her at their hands, at the risk of being rejected by herself, and would rather have died than have brooked, what he would have considered, a gross indignity. At the expiration of six months he obtained permission from the fair Isabelle to address himself to her parents, who, without the least hesitation, acceded to his proposals, and promised to use their influence in favouring his suit with their daughter, unconscious of his having already won her affections. Never, in all the course of his life, had De Clifforde experienced such felicity, and the charming Isabelle, too, appeared to participate in her lover's happiness. The various gallants who fluttered around, rather increased than diminished De Clifforde's pleasure, for the coldness and reserve with which she listened to their compliments, added to his triumph.

The sun doth never shine, but there are shadows; and De Clifforde's pleasure, notwithstanding his success, was considerably damped by the appearance of a very formidable rival in the person of Count D'Arle-ville, one of the richest noblemen in France; for he was aware, maugre the inequality of the match, for the Count was fifty, and of a diminutive, and far from agreeable person, that the avarice of Isabelle's parents would incline them to listen to his splendid proposals. The moment he heard this discouraging intelligence,

he sought his mistress, whom he found bathed in tears. His heart sunk within him at this ominous sight; and when she informed him of her father's commands, to receive the Count as her future husband, and that, on the noon of the next day, he was to wait upon her, De Clifford was nearly distracted.

"Oh, Isabelle!" exclaimed he—"If thy parents have the cruelty to make such a sacrifice, wilt thou listen to his disgusting addresses, and, by a tacit compliance with their will, ruin the hopes and happiness of thy Arthur for ever! Nay, thou can'st not wound the heart that loves thee so; thou can'st not so soon forget the mutual vows we have made in the presence of that Being who reads our hearts; I would not bid thee scorn the commands of thy parents, if they were just; but have they not countenanced my love for thee, and now thy image clings closely round my heart, their vile sordid avarice would tear thee away. Dear Isabelle, disobedience now, indeed, were just and pardonable; say thou wilt be mine—speak! And not all their power shall force thee from my arms: I will brave them all!"

"De Clifford," said Isabelle, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion, "thou know'st I—I love thee, yet—my father commands me to receive the Count upon pain of his eternal displeasure—nay—his curse. I dare not——"

"Dare not!" echoed the almost frantic De Clifford. "Say not so, but bid me quit thee, Isabelle; say thy fickle heart hath changed, and thou no longer lov'st

me—'twere mercy to tell me so—yes; mercy! To crush at once, rather than hold my spirit in such torturing suspense! What—Isabelle—angel—Oh! God, she dies! Help, help!"

In a moment the alarmed attendants ran to the aid of the fainting Isabelle, who had fallen senseless at the feet of her lover, and bore her to her chamber, followed by her agonized lover, who paced up and down before the door of the apartment in the greatest agitation; and half an hour elapsed, which, to the anxious knight, appeared an age, ere he received the pleasing intelligence of her recovery. On the morrow, fearful of De Clifford's influence upon his daughter, the father of Isabelle proposed to the Count D'Arle-ville to embark immediately for England, and thus avoid the importunities and intrigues of the young knight; at the same time it would offer the Count an opportunity of pressing his suit without the fear of rivalry. D'Arle-ville did not hesitate to close with a proposal so flattering to his hopes; and the next night, when De Clifford had retired after paying his usual visit, they secretly departed, to the horror and astonishment of Isabelle; but she knew resistance was in vain, and she wept in silence. The winds were favourable, and long ere the morning sun arose, their bark had touched the shores of Albion.

When the injured De Clifford learned the extent of his misfortune, instead of breaking forth into impetuous and ungovernable rage, as was expected, a heart-rending sigh alone escaped his pale and tremu-

lous lips ; and, remaining silent for a moment, he, with the greatest difficulty, requested the domestic to inform him of their destination, offering to reward him handsomely for the information. But he knew not ; and De Clifforde quitted the château, where he had passed the most blissful days of his life, with a broken heart, cursing the avarice of Isabelle's parents, which had so suddenly and unexpectedly imbibited his joys. In the present distracted state of his mind, he knew not what to determine upon, and wandered about unconscious of the surrounding objects, till he found himself on the sea-shore, and the refreshing breezes, fanning his feverish brow, aroused him from his reverie. There were a number of poor fishermen busily employed in repairing their nets and fishing-tackle, and observing one pushing from the shore to reach his smack, which lay at anchor in the distance, De Clifforde hailed him, and after a little conversation with the man, and the offer of a handsome gratuity, he prevailed upon him to carry him in his vessel to England, ignorant of it, yet hoping that he might discover the fugitives there ; for he was determined not to relinquish the object of his affections, till her unnatural parents should have forced her to an alliance with his rival ; and he still cherished the deluding hope, that his loved Isabelle possessed firmness and resolution enough to resist their commands. He quitted the scene of his misfortunes, but his evil fate still pursued him. For five days the little vessel was beating about at the mercy of the winds and waves,

and he was hopeless of ever beholding England again; when the wind suddenly shifting to a favourable quarter, he had the pleasure, if such a sentiment could possibly be experienced by one so truly miserable, of setting his foot on British ground. Here fickle fortune seemed to relent and smile upon him once again, for, upon inquiry, he learned that two gentlemen and a lady had landed there a few days since, answering to the description of those whom he sought, and that they had immediately departed for the city of London, to which place De Clifforde turned his eager steps without delay, and with great difficulty discovered the retreat of Isabelle; but apprehensive, if he were recognised by her father or the Count, it might be the means of hastening his fate, or depriving him again of Isabelle, he habited himself in the humble guise we have seen, and, by his kindness and frequent presents of game to the valet of Count D'Arleville, he completely gained his good graces, and eventually obtained admission to the house.

Meanwhile the youthful Isabelle, pleased with the attentions of the Count, and the splendid presents he daily offered her, began by degrees to chase from her memory the gallant De Clifforde, for vanity was her ruling passion, and she saw, in the participation of Count D'Arleville's immense fortune, an inexhaustible source of gratification; nor did her heart feel the least compunction at this cruel resolve, for she excused herself by laying to the account of obedience, what was merely the effect of her fickle disposition. De Clifforde

observed the costly manner in which the mansion was furnished, and the elegant and luxurious way in which they lived, and yet hardly dared to fear it would have an influence on the mind of his mistress; but she was young, and female minds he knew were prone to value pomp and glitter. But, alas! De Clifford read his fate in the confusion of Isabelle on his first stolen interview; the blood mounted in her cheeks, but it was not the blush that crimsons the cheek on the recognition of a beloved object; her tears flowed when the fond Arthur solicited her to speak comfort to his foreboding heart, but she was silent. Her situation was truly painful, for she dreaded to meet the angry glance of him who loved her—whose hopes of happiness she had blasted by the avowal of her intention to obey her father. The agitation of both was so great, though arising from very different causes, that they were unconscious of the approach of her father and the Count, till the voice of the former met the ear of the kneeling and imploring De Clifford, who immediately arose, and turning round upon the intruders, they instantly recognised the knight; and, in the greatest alarm, exclaimed, in one breath,

“ De Clifford!”

“ The same,” cried Sir Arthur—“ art thou surprised I should seek my betrothed wife? Oh! this confusion doth well become thee. Thou art conscious of having deeply injured me, but be assured I depart not from hence till I hear from the lips of thy daughter

Isabelle, that she hath abjured me, and prefers this silly old man!"

"Sir Arthur!" exclaimed the Count, trembling with rage—"My sword ———"

"Nay, e'en pick thy teeth with it, D'Arleville," said Sir Arthur, coolly,—"I wear one, too;" clapping his hand on the hilt; "but fear not, though thou dost richly deserve chastisement for thy meanness and base conspiracy against my happiness; thy shrivelled carcase shall go unharmed—I do despise thee!"

"Sacre Dieu!" cried the Count, stung to the quick at the contemptuous and cutting manner in which Sir Arthur treated him. "Thou shalt answer this insult with thy life; and let this console thee—Isabelle doth abjure thee!—To-morrow she bestows her hand on Count D'Arleville, 'the silly old man;' ay, by her own consent!"

"Thou lyest!" exclaimed Sir Arthur, drawing his sword; and had not a shriek from Isabelle stemmed the torrent of his rage, he would certainly have imolated the Count. The sight of the pale countenance of his Isabelle, as she lay in the arms of her father, recalled to his recollection that mournful evening, on which his misfortunes commenced, when she fell lifeless at his feet; and it unnerved his arm—his sword fell harmless from his grasp, and in a moment he was by her side. The Count threw open the casement, and Sir Arthur soon saw with pleasure the returning colour in Isabelle's cheeks. She cast her

fine eyes languidly upon his face as he kneeled, anxiously watching the change in her lovely countenance.

D'Arleville looked on, but was fearful of arousing the anger of his rival by the least word or emotion.

“ De Clifforde !” said she, laying her hand on his shoulder—“ Leave me !”

“ Leave thee, Isabelle ?” exclaimed he, rising.

“ Sir Arthur !” said her father—“ It is in vain to expostulate with my daughter ; she willingly consents to become Count D'Arleville's wife ! Thou seemest incredulous ; nay, then—Isabelle ——”

“ Speak,” cried De Clifforde, trembling with agitation, and drawing his hand across his feverish brow ; “ my life hangs upon a single thread. Remember how I have loved thee, Isabelle ; and, if thy heart be faithless, oh ! let not those lips, on whose accents my fond soul oft hath hung enraptured, pronounce the cruel sentence which is to doom me to misery. Yes—I see—I read it in thine eyes—those eyes that once warmed my heart with love, now fire my brain with madness !”

Sir Arthur de Clifforde had proceeded thus far in the narration of his misfortunes, when sudden and alarming cries of, “ Fire !”—“ Fire !” and “ to arms !” issued from a hundred voices in the court below ; and Baron Fitz-Walter consigning the terrified Matilda to the care of De Clifforde, instantly rushed from the apartment, his mind filled with the most dreadful apprehensions, to inquire into the cause of this tumult.

CHAPTER XIV.

I must inform you of a dismal fight.

Henry VI. Part 1.

KING John expected every thing from the daring and impetuous character of Arthur, and rejoiced in the chance which had so opportunely thrown him in his path; firmly believing he would sacrifice Matilda for the sake of the handsome reward he had promised him, supposing him to be some gentleman in distress, whom his mistress had cast off for a richer partner. Indeed, from the moment De Clifford recognised the King, and learned his purpose, he had endeavoured to impress him with this idea, which partly, unfortunately for the Knight, was too true; and for every question of John's, however artfully put, he had a fitting answer ready. The evening came, and so desirous was the King to hear from Arthur's own lips the execution of his horrid purpose, that he remained in the forest, at a few yards' distance from the spot where the horses were stationed, in readiness to bear away De Clifford and one of his own men, who was to accompany the knight to the first port.

A tedious hour elapsed in the most torturing suspense, and John began to dread Arthur had failed in his attempt, or perhaps executed his purpose, and fallen a victim to the rage and vengeance of Fitz-Walter; and this last idea consoled him; for so that he had been able to destroy Matilda, John was reckless of the fate of Arthur; nay, even wished that death might have stepped in, and relieved him from the payment of the pecuniary reward he had promised him. At last, the sound of approaching footsteps raised his hopes—they came quick and hurried—nearer and nearer; and he exclaimed, as he walked eagerly forward,

“Who comes? Who comes?”

“Arnold!” replied a voice.

“D—n—tion!” exclaimed the disappointed King, stamping with fury, and seizing the surprised and terrified Arnold by the arm. “Why—who—what—how darest thou come?”

“Pardon me, your Grace,” said the almost breathless Arnold, “if my diligence hath offended thee——”

“Diligence! What mean—Ah! we remember now. Our agitation, good Arnold, hath blinded us to our dear friend,” speaking in a conciliating tone, and taking him by the hand; “when thou know’st the cause, thou wilt o’erlook our impetuosity; but—the soldiers! Are they coming?”

“They are near at hand, your Grace.”

“Thank thee—a thousand thanks, good Arnold. Thy diligence is praiseworthy, and merits our best

reward. Come this way, and we will whisper in thine ear the reason of our lurking here ;" and leaning on Arnold's arm, they withdrew a few paces from the horseman, and the King related to his confidant all that had passed during his absence.

Though naturally of a morose disposition, and dead to the finer feelings of humanity, Arnold was horror-struck at the cold-blooded and premeditated manner in which his sovereign had planned the destruction of Matilda ; and when the King had concluded :

" Merciful heavens !" ejaculated Arnold ; and a moment of profound silence ensued, during which the King was in the utmost perplexity ; the meaning of this exclamation being as inexplicable as unexpected.

" I crave your Grace's pardon, for what I am about to say," continued Arnold.

" We grant it, yet we divine by thy manner, thou think'st we have erred."

" Most true, your Grace ; and much I fear from the failure or discovery of the assassin. He may be seized, and confess ———"

" He knows not his employer."

" His ignorance will not blind their suspicion, which will, without hesitation, attach itself to your Grace. Old Fitz-Walter will weep his woful tale to the Barons, who are always ready to take up arms against their King, and their traitorous aid will again preclude your Grace from ———"

" Enough, Arnold ; we see the danger that surrounds us ; but this tool came so ready to our hands,

that we thought fate had thrust it in our way, that we might use it. Hadst thou been near, good Arnold, we should not have grasped so eagerly at the offered weapon of revenge. Now, Arnold, it remains for us to determine upon some immediate plan to extricate ourselves. What dost thou advise ?”

“ I am but a poor counsellor, your Grace. When danger’s nigh, I fain would act, and try by force of arms to evade it; and this is all my wisdom teaches. At present, if the assassin be seized, or has committed the deed, the knowledge is confined to those within the walls; and methinks ’twere better to bury them and the secret in the ruins of Castle Baynard, than let rumour spread the tale abroad. The soldiers are here, their number is considerable, and the hope of plunder will render them irresistible.”

“ And it shall be as thou say’st, Arnold; thy tongue hath expressed our very wish. Assemble them,—make every preparation for firing the castle, and we will arm and join them instantly.”

Then mounting the horse that had been waiting for Sir Arthur, and followed by the soldier, he proceeded to prepare himself for the encounter. Meanwhile, Arnold joined the soldiers, and delivered to their leaders, all willing creatures of John’s, their sovereign’s commands, which were received with the greatest and most inhuman demonstrations of joy, all expecting to reap great advantage from the darkness of the night, and the consternation into which their sudden appearance would throw Fitz-Walter’s vas-

sals ; and, under the guidance of Arnold, they entered the city.

When the sentinels at Castle Baynard, who were partly apprized of some danger being at hand, by the order to double the guard, beheld the immense numbers of armed men pouring down upon the castle, they gave the alarm ; but so desperate and determined was the assault, that the enemy had forced the gates ere they could assemble to oppose them ; and when Baron Fitz-Walter descended to learn the cause of the outcry, he saw his men, some only half armed, attacking the assailants, but their opposition was very feeble, and their numbers so small in comparison with the enemy, that he had little hope of their success. They had already fired part of the castle, and the flames were quickly spreading. Fitz-Walter encouraged the men by his presence, and forming them in the best order he possibly could, he ordered the port-cullis to be lowered, and, for a short time, cut off all communication and succour from without ; and the number of his vassals being increased by the continual arrival of their comrades, began to make some impression on the enemy.

Matilda heard the increasing confusion and clash of arms, and not all Sir Arthur's eloquence could allay her fears. Edward, whom the noise had aroused, had also sought his beloved mistress, and aided Sir Arthur in his endeavours to cheer her ; although he was somewhat surprised to find a stranger of such humble appearance talking so freely with Matilda. He knew not

De Clifford was the person who preserved him from a watery grave, for he did not recover till after the former's departure, and Matilda was too much agitated at present to think of introducing them to each other.

"The King—the King, my dear child, has devoted us to destruction!" exclaimed Fitz-Walter, rushing into the apartment with his sword drawn and reeking with the blood of his enemies, "The tyrant has just arrived, and urges on his men to plunder!"

De Clifford instinctively unsheathed his sword.

"He has fired the castle," continued the Baron, "and the flames are rapidly advancing towards this quarter!"

"My Lord!" said Walter, entering the apartment in breathless haste, "one hundred of the citizens completely armed have arrived to succour us, and are now mounting the walls by scaling ladders from their boats on the river-side!"

Having delivered this welcome intelligence, he retired to use his best efforts in the cause of the Baron.

"Thank Heaven!" said Fitz-Walter emphatically, "for blessing me with such friends as these, who sympathize in my misfortunes, and seek me in the hour of trouble!" then turning to the knight, "De Clifford, to thy protecting arm I consign my sweet Matilda!" Sir Arthur bowed, "Edward!" continued the Baron, "lead the way to the painted chamber in the western tower, where thou, Matilda, wilt remain till heaven decides our fate!" and tenderly embracing her, he rejoined his valiant men.

The assistance of the citizens merely delayed for a short time the fate of Fitz-Walter ; it was in vain they turned their swords against superior numbers, no sooner had they despatched one foe than two appeared to rise in his place, and the bravest among them became weary and discouraged.

The King was in the midst of his soldiery, exciting them to the work of destruction. Arnold led on a strong party bearing combustibles for firing the castle, which already blazed in several places, shewing, by its red and awful glare, the gleaming swords of the combatants. Walter observed the intention of this fearful body, and finding it impracticable to divert it, he drew up his men at the entrance of the western tower, where Matilda was under the care of De Clifforde, her page, and poor old Ambrose. Arnold met him point to point ; the contest was doubtful—they were equal in strength and courage ; but the good fortune of Walter at last prevailed, and his antagonist lay stretched upon the dead bodies of friends and foes. He had killed their leader, but his single arm could not contend against a host, and the western tower was soon enveloped in flames.

Fitz-Walter, exhausted with fatigue and the loss of blood from several wounds, soon became an easy conquest, and was led a prisoner to the King.

“ To the Tower with the traitor ! ” cried the King to the soldiers who supported the bleeding Fitz-Walter. He had lost his helmet in the fray, and his long white straggling locks hung in disorder o'er his

woe-worn face ; he seemed insensible to his forlorn situation, till the name of his dear Matilda echoed by a thousand tongues, struck upon his ear and aroused his fast-failing senses. He cast his eyes towards the western tower, he saw the raging element, and beheld his beloved Matilda on the battlements stretching forth her arms for aid ; Edward was by her side imploring by signs the pity of the soldiers for his mistress.

“ O King ! as thou dost wish for mercy,” exclaimed the agonized parent, “ save my child. Call off those bloodhounds and let my willing vassals pass free and save her—be quick, or all is lost. Speak—command, and I will be thy meanest slave and bless thee. See, see the flames devour the building.—Soldiers, if ye have wives or daughters, for their sakes unhand me.—Fiends of hell, why do ye grapple me ?—De Clifford ! Walter ! where art thou ? Oh ! heartless tyrant ! Wilt thou risk a father’s curse ? Matilda—my child—my darling child !—Oh, God ! she falls and no hand near to save. Accursed King !”

He said—he saw no more, but fell exhausted in the arms of the inhuman soldiers, who instantly bore him away to the Tower.

The whole castle was soon in flames, and the vassals fled in dismay towards the water-gate, where they crowded into the boats and reached the opposite shore without any opposition from the King, who hastily withdrew his men from the burning pile and retreated from London, his cruel vengeance completely satisfied.

When Walter was obliged to retire from before the

western tower, the soldiers attempted to force an entrance, and De Clifford, aware if they succeeded that it would be certain destruction to Matilda, for there were no possible means of escape, descended to barricade the gate, which having done without the aid of any hand except his own, for every one who could wield a sword was fighting in the court, he remained on the stone steps leading to the painted chamber, determined to guard it with his life. But, unfortunately, there was a private staircase which communicated with another part of the castle of which he was ignorant, and while he was inwardly rejoicing at the present security of Matilda, she was in the most imminent danger; for one of the King's soldiers had, by the assistance of a scaling ladder, effected an entrance by a window of the castle, and passed through the deserted apartments, breaking open every thing which he found in his way, loading himself with the most valuable, and strewing what was bulky or too weighty upon the floor. In the course of his rambles, he perceived by the light of the flambeau which he bore in his hand, the small narrow staircase which led to the painted chamber, and reckless of where it might lead him, he followed its winding course. Matilda, who supposed it was De Clifford opening the door, was about to ask him tidings of her father, but when she beheld the ferocious countenance of the soldier, the words died upon her lips, and shrieking with terror, called loudly on De Clifford for succour; but the din of the battle, and the distance of the chamber pre-

cluded him from hearing her voice. The soldier uttered not a word, but regarding this as an easy conquest, he closed fast the door. The silence, the mysterious and uncouth appearance of the intruder, chilled Matilda's palpitating heart with horror.

With the same unconcern with which he had entered the apartment, he was advancing towards the terrified Matilda, when old Ambrose, whose blood boiled within him at the villain's insolent demeanour, drew his sword to prevent his approach.

“ *Ey!—Oh! oh!*” exclaimed the soldier, whose flushed cheeks and thick and difficult enunciation proved he had made very free with the Baron's wine as well as his jewels ; “ It wont do, old boy, I want the lady's jewels. Put thy sword i'the scabbard, or I'll cut thy—throat presently. What ?—thou wilt not—then at thee—” and he aimed a blow at Ambrose, who dexterously warded it off, for though his sword had been worn of late years more for ornament than utility, he had followed the Baron's father in his youth, and bravely and successfully brandished his sword, and though old now he had not forgotten how to use it ; and the soldier being inebriated, would soon have forfeited his life to his temerity, had he not, exasperated at this opposition, dealt such furious blows, that poor old Ambrose found it required all his remaining strength to act on the defensive. The brave little Edward saw the danger which threatened them all, and with a trembling heart and hand he stepped unperceived behind the soldier, who was fast gaining

upon the old domestic, and with the greatest resolution plunged his poignard in the villain's heart. He fell instantly without a groan. Matilda ran and led her venerable protector to the couch, for the great exertion had almost rendered him incapable of supporting his feeble frame. They had scarcely recovered a little from the alarm of this attack, when they perceived that the flame of the soldier's fallen flambeau had communicated to the tapestry, and that they were in imminent danger of being burnt to death. They attempted to escape, but all their efforts were unable to force the door, in the lock of which they discovered the drunken soldier had broken the key, and their only hope was to mount the small flight of steps which led from the apartment to the battlements. The moment they appeared the lovely Matilda was recognised by the soldiery, her father, and the King. Walter saw the danger of his Lady, and leaving his men to their own direction, he resolved upon her rescue. He was well acquainted with the intricacies of the castle, and forthwith directed his steps towards the private staircase which led to the turret. Sir Arthur believing from the cessation of noise without, that the enemy were retreating, and thinking all secure, was just returning to Matilda as Walter reached the door and was endeavouring with all his might to force it. Observing the violence which he used, and supposing they had closed the door in their own defence, De Clifford rushed upon him with his drawn sword. Each considering the other an enemy,

a furious combat ensued, and chance, not skill, was likely to decide the victory, for, on account of the obscurity, they could not recognise each other. In the scuffle, De Clifford's foot slipping, he fell, and Walter, pointing his sword to his breast, exclaimed:—

“Foregad, I thought thee a slippery fellow; now, whatever thou say'st, I'll say in truth thou liest. So get up and decamp, and tell Lackland that Fitz-Walter's soldiers never stab an enemy in the dark!”

“Walter!” cried Sir Arthur, rising; “is it possible I have crossed the sword of my friend?”

“By St. Dominick is it!” replied Walter, “but prithee let's hasten to my Lady Matilda, the tower is on fire in several places——”

“Merciful heavens!” exclaimed De Clifford, finding the door was made fast on the inside, and that no answer was returned to his demand to open; “I am bewildered; what dreadful calamity hath befallen them!”

Thick volumes of black smoke which proceeded from both the staircases, which had already caught fire below, almost suffocated them. At length, after great difficulty, the door gave way to their united strength. The rich tapestry was completely consumed, and nothing but the bare stone walls remained, and when they beheld the dead body of the soldier by the light of the torch which still lay burning near him, they shuddered with horror, and the most dreadful apprehensions filled their minds. Walter instantly proceeded to the narrow flight of steps followed by Sir

Arthur. In a few minutes they returned, their search had been fruitless, Matilda and her attendants were nowhere to be seen.

“Good heavens! where can they have concealed themselves!” cried Sir Arthur, searching around the room and calling upon their names, for the torch was extinguished, and the smoke was so dense that they could see nothing.

“A thought has struck me,” continued Sir Arthur, “they have probably escaped. How didst thou arrive here without passing me?”

“By a private way.”

“Then they have perhaps fled by the same means!”

“Impossible!—I should have met them—I saw the flames raging, and Lady Matilda imploring pity—I flew—the door was fast—there is no other outlet. Arthur—I fear—I dread to tell thee my suspicions.—They have fallen or thrown themselves from the tower!”

“Alas! fair Matilda, why—why did I quit thee for a moment?”

“Matilda’s safe!” whispered a low voice in the ear of Walter.

“Thank heaven!” ejaculated he.

Arthur, who was at the other extremity of the chamber, heard him, and eagerly inquired the cause.

“Matilda’s safe!” replied Walter with ecstasy, “at least, I hear so, for its so devilish smoky—I can’t see my——”

“ Who—how know’st thou, Walter ? Can it be true ?”

“ I hope so !” said Walter, and extending his arms, demanded the name of the person who had rendered them so happy by his information.

“ Lord, Walter, it’s me, Gilbert !”

“ Gilbert !” exclaimed Walter, surprised, “ thou’rt the devil, how cam’st thou here ? Where is my Lady —Ambrose, and the page ?”

“ All safe !” replied Gilbert, “ this way, follow me, and I’ll bring thee to them presently.”

“ A’God’s name, despatch then, or we shall be all buried in the ruins ; I’m half roasted already.”

They followed Gilbert, who, to the astonishment of Sir Arthur and his companion, passed through a small opening in the wall, at the foot of the flight of stone steps which led to the turret.

CHAPTER XV.

Prithee, away;
There's more to be considered; but we'll even
All that good time will give us; this attempt
I'm soldier to, and will abide it with
A prince's courage. Away, I prithee.

Cymbeline.

AFTER descending for a considerable time a very narrow flight of stone steps, which apparently ran in a serpentine form between the walls of the turret, Gilbert led Sir Arthur and his friend Walter through a long passage into a kind of maze, with the intricacies of which the Gosling appeared perfectly well acquainted, and presently stopping, he tapped gently at a door, which, on account of the darkness, was imperceptible to their eyes, and they were agreeably surprised by the appearance of little Edward, who instantly opened it.

“ Ah, Walter !” cried the page, “ I am so glad to see thee. My Lady's eyes are dim with weeping ; perchance thou bring'st good tidings of my dear Lord's safety to cheer her heart !”

Matilda was kneeling beside poor old Ambrose, who was stretched upon some straw in one corner of the

lofty and spacious apartment which they entered. A small lamp was on the oaken floor by her side, which merely served to show the chilly gloominess of the place. She perceived them enter, and arose.

“ My father—where’s my father ?” demanded she, advancing towards them, and seeing he was not of their number, “ De Clifforde—Walter—know’st thou ought of him ? Speak—tell me, has he escaped, or has the sword of the cruel enemy——”

“ He lives !” replied Walter.

“ Gracious heaven be praised !” exclaimed Matilda.

“ But he is a prisoner. At the moment I was flying to thy aid, I heard the stern voice of the King command them to bear my Lord to the tower. Rescue would have been a vain attempt, our numbers were too few, and the greater part were wounded and spiritless.”

“ So that my father lives, I am happy. He shall not long remain in captivity ; I will seek the Barons and plead his cause with all the warmth and eloquence filial affection prompts, and we shall soon see the cruel tyrant bend beneath the rod. But I pray ye, good friends, come hither ; here is one, an old faithful servant, who requires all gentleness and attention. He has boldly drawn his sword in my defence, and nobly risked his precious life for mine.”

They all approached Ambrose ; Matilda softly raised his hoary head, and he turned his lustreless and dying eyes upon her face and murmured a benediction.

“ Ambrose !” said Walter, and took his listless

hand and pressed it. But he could say no more, he saw his dissolution was near at hand, and wept in silence, for he venerated the old man and loved him as a father.

"How can we relieve him?" asked De Clifford. "His lips seem parched and dry. Hast thou no cordial, or a cup of water near?"

The old man raised his eyes and fixed them on Sir Arthur with a look full of gratitude. He had been nearly suffocated by the heat and smoke; a burning fever raged within him, and nothing could possibly be more agreeable or more desired by him than water. But his speech had failed or become almost inaudible. Gilbert offered to procure some in a few minutes, and was on the point of putting his kind intentions into execution, at the imminent risk of losing his life, for several of the soldiers were straggling up and down searching for plunder among the ruins, when Ambrose made a sign for them to draw near. De Clifford and Walter kneeled down beside him and raised him in their arms; Matilda supported herself upon Edward, who mingled his tears with hers; Gilbert stood at a respectful distance with his hands before him, not less grieved than the rest, for although the imperfect light precluded them from observing his tears, they could distinctly hear his sobs and sighs. Ambrose endeavoured to speak, but no sounds escaped his trembling lips, his parched tongue cleaved to his mouth, his eyes closed, and the ancient and revered domestic sunk without a struggle into eternal repose.

“ Life hath fled ! ” said De Clifforde, mournfully.

“ Heaven rest his soul ! ” ejaculated Walter ; and every one with voices broken with weeping and sorrow, solemnly uttered, “ Amen ! ”

It was a sad and afflicting sight for Matilda to witness the dissolution of one whom she had known from her earliest infancy ; who had served her family from his boyhood with fidelity, and was beloved by all for his mild and excellent disposition. But grief had become so familiar to her of late, that she no longer regarded death with that horror which is so natural to youthful minds, rather considering it as the passport to purer felicity and joy.

Under the guidance of Gilbert, and by the faint light of the lamp, Sir Arthur and Walter carried the corpse of Ambrose into an adjoining chamber, while Edward, with the assistance of their cloaks, formed a tolerable couch for Matilda. But the agitation of her mind would not allow her to repose ; she thought on her father’s captivity, and her bosom burned with indignation and horror at the King’s cruel and tyrannous conduct, and she planned a thousand wild and impracticable schemes for the release of her father, supposing, in the simplicity of her heart, that all the world would fly to her aid when convinced of the justness of her cause ; then her thoughts recurred to the happy time when De Mountfort was in England, and believed that happiness would again return upon his re-appearance ; at last, towards morning, nature gave way to excessive fatigue, a drowsiness came over her

eyelids, and she fell into a restless and unrefreshing slumber.

The subterranean labyrinth, or maze, into which Gilbert had introduced them, was beneath the ruins of a Roman temple, formerly dedicated to Diana, in the vicinity of Castle Baynard, which he had accidentally discovered to have a communication with it. Rambling among these ruins, he had, by chance, observed the door which led to these subterranean apartments, and having often heard tales of treasures being concealed in places similar to these, he was heartily rejoiced at his discovery, and, before he quitted the spot, carefully concealed the entrance from view, by strewing some of the mouldering ruins upon it; but this was almost needless, for it was situated in such an obscure corner of the pile, that it was only wonderful how he could ever have perceived it. In the evening of the same day he returned with the resolution of exploring it, provided with crow-bar, tinder-box, and torch; and, having industriously cleared away the broken pieces of stone and rubbish, working in the dark, lest the light of his torch should alarm any passenger, he, with much difficulty, raised the door, and now striking a light, he saw a flight of steps, which, without reflecting upon the consequences, he instantly descended, perfectly assured he should meet with no opposition from any thing in human form, in a place which had been closed up for so many years; and he was too good a catholic to fear danger from any thing supernatural. With his torch in one hand, and a crowbar in the other, he walked

slowly on, minutely examining the floor, walls, and roof, taking the precaution to make notches on the wall at every turning, that he might not be bewildered when he wished to return. After winding and turning about in various directions, through long, vaulted passages for an hour, he at last observed the door which opened into the principal apartment, which he entered and surveyed with surprise. It was completely destitute of furniture, and the bare walls struck cold and damp, and mournfully echoed his footsteps. There were two rooms adjoining, inferior in magnitude, these he likewise examined, but found no sign of any treasure. Perfectly satisfied with his scrutiny, he closed the doors, and now began to think of returning; when, about the distance of fifty yards from the apartment, he discovered a flight of steps, which before had escaped his observation, too narrow to admit of more than one person at a time, and his curiosity impelled him to mount them. Ascending about two hundred steps in a circular form, he arrived at the summit, and perceived that his progress was impeded by an iron door, secured by means of a bar; he lifted it, but on opening the door, was startled by a sudden glare of light which broke upon him. He drew back and listened, and hearing no sounds of any human voice, he ventured forth, and entered the painted chamber in Castle Baynard, and when he beheld the beautiful tapestry, he perfectly remembered having been there with Maude, who had favoured him with a sight of it, and was convinced the place he had

entered was no other than Baron Fitz-Walter's castle. Terrified at the idea of being discovered in such a situation, and the unfavourable suspicions it would naturally raise against him, he hastily retreated, barring the door, which he found was cased with stone on the reverse, to match the wall and steps which led to the turret. Gilbert was certainly very right in returning so speedily, for his figure was really such as to excite the worst suspicions ; his clothes were dusty and covered with cobwebs, his face black and dirty, and the crow-bar, which he bore in his right hand, assisted to give him the appearance of a midnight murderer.

He returned home heartily fatigued with his exploit, yet, nevertheless, pleased with his discovery. His first intention was to acquaint the Baron with it ; but when he reflected, that perhaps it was already known to him, and to him alone, he was aware it would be dangerous to discover that he was also in the secret, and finally resolved never to divulge it.

On the night of the King's attack, Gilbert was in the labyrinth, endeavouring to make further discoveries, convinced that such a place must have been formed to conceal or secure something. The sound of the battering-rams, the clang of arms, and the ringing of mail, however reached his ears, and much alarmed, he quickly ascended, and beheld with astonishment the general conflagration, which almost transformed night into day. He saw the danger which threatened Matilda and her page, and, instantly descending, flew

swiftly through the intricate windings of the labyrinth, threading them with the celerity of lightning, and reached the turret at the moment Matilda fainted; with much difficulty, and by the assistance of Edward, Gilbert carried her safe to the subterranean apartment. The change of air was cool and refreshing, and revived Matilda, who no sooner learned that she was in safety, than she called for her faithful Ambrose, and begged Gilbert to save him, and the kind-hearted fellow quitted them to search for the old man, whom he found still lying on the couch, speechless and nearly suffocated.

The unfortunate Baron Fitz-Walter was borne in a state of happy insensibility to the Tower, where, by order of the King, he was securely confined. The governor, however, had the humanity to procure a chirurgeon to dress his wounds, and he once more returned to a sense of his misfortunes. The agitation of his mind, and the wounds inflicted on his body, occasioned a dangerous and alarming fever, which continued for several days; but, by the kindness and skill of the chirurgeon, whose assiduity and attention to the unfortunate nobleman were truly praiseworthy, his corporeal sufferings were speedily ameliorated, and there were the most favourable symptoms of the re-establishment of his health; and, sincerely as before he had wished for death to put a period to his miseries, he now hoped to live, to take vengeance on the despoiler and the murderer of his child. But he recollects that all his designs were effectually frus-

trated by his incarceration, and he believed the Barons were too interested to demand his deliverance from the King, even if they should learn that he was in captivity, which John, for his own sake, would endeavour to conceal. He had already been three weeks within the tower, and could learn no tidings from those who brought his daily allowance, of the King's intentions towards him, and could only suppose that he was destined to spend the remainder of his days in prison. His only consolation was in the prospect of Sir Eustace de Mountfort's return; being well assured, that he would leave no means untried to effect his rescue, as soon as he became acquainted with his situation. De Clifford, he imagined, had lost his life, for he had too good an opinion of the knight's gallantry and courage, to suppose he would otherwise have left Matilda to perish in the flames, therefore any succour from that quarter was hopeless; and as for his vassals, whatever their fidelity might prompt them to, they were incapable of assisting him on account of their limited power.

One evening, just as the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, leaving still a faint tinge of yellow light in the western sky, a venerable old man, supporting his tottering frame upon an oaken staff, applied to the warden of the Tower, and demanded to speak with the governor, and was immediately admitted, for his appearance was such as to ensure him respect. He wore a dress of grey frieze fastened round his waist with a strong cord, and a cap or bonnet of the same

stuff; his hair, which hung loosely about his shoulders, and his flowing beard, were silvery white; his countenance pale, but serene. The governor granted him an audience, and received him with the respect due to his years, asking him, with the greatest condescension, in what he could serve him.

“Governor!” said the old man, leaning with both hands upon his staff, and fixing his eyes upon him—“I learn, and much grieved am I to hear it, that thou dost hold Baron Fitz-Walter, of Castle Baynard, a prisoner within these walls.”

“True,” replied the governor, somewhat surprised at his manner, “by the King’s command; he stands accused of treason!”

“Dost thou know him? And canst thou believe the accusation just?”

“I cannot—I dare not decide upon the merits of the cause—I am a servant of the King’s!”

“I pity——” he would have added, “the man who serves so vile a master,” but he checked himself, and continued. “Wilt thou, governor, permit me to speak a few words with the prisoner? Thou dost hesitate. Surely thou hast nought to fear from me; whate’er my will may be, my feeble strength is insufficient to attempt a rescue. Think, governor, if thou had’st some bosom friend—a playmate of thy youthful days—a companion in arms, whom for years thou hadst not seen; would not the sight of such an one rejoice thy heart, even wert thou in prosperity; and in trouble, would not he be doubly dear? Such

friends Fitz-Walter and I have been. Misfortunes have divided us for many years; death may soon separate us again, to meet, I hope, in a happier world, where troubles are not!"

"I am strictly charged to admit no one," said the governor, evidently moved by the persuasive words of the old man; "yet thou dost plead thy request so warmly, I cannot refuse thee. But I must be constrained to limit thy conference to a quarter of an hour."

The old man cordially thanked him for this indulgence, and, attended by two of the guard, whom the governor had instructed how to proceed, he approached the cell of the Baron. They unbarred the massy door in silence, he entered, and they closed it upon him, remaining on the outside. The noise which they made aroused the attention of Fitz-Walter, and he slowly raised his head, to observe who came at such an unusual hour. He was sitting on a small bench, with both his arms resting on a table, on which were a horn and an empty wine flask. A small iron lamp with a single wick illumined his apartment, and showed his pale and care-worn countenance.

"Who comes?" said he, rising.

"A friend!"

"Alas! I know thee not; thou dost mistake me!"

"Art thou not, Baron Fitz-Walter, and did'st thou ever want a friend in adversity? But seat thyself; I have much to communicate, and but short space allowed to tell it in.—I am come to set thee free!"

The Baron approached him, placed his hands upon the old man's shoulders, and gazed steadfastly upon him.

"I pray thee, old man, do not mock me!" said he, in such a beseeching tone, and withal so piteous, that a tear glistened in the stranger's eye. "Feed me not with sweet delusion. What power hast thou to aid me?"

"Hush! speak not so loud, or we are lost. See!" added he, pulling off his false beard and hair; "dost thou not know me now?"

"My friend!—De Clifford!—Gracious heavens!" exclaimed the Baron, embracing Sir Arthur.

"Hush!" said De Clifford, putting his finger on his lips and pointing to the door, for he feared their conversation would be overheard by the soldiers; "Quick, put on this disguise and thou art safe!"

"And thou——"

"I will remain in thy place; now prithee despatch —give me thy doublet—haste! or all is lost."

"Generous friend!" cried the Baron, wavering between the love of liberty, his hopes of vengeance, and his sincere friendship for the knight; "I cannot—I will not leave thee here, to die perhaps an ignominious death——"

"Fitz-Walter!" said the knight in a firm and determined tone, "if thou art resolved not to profit by this opportunity, I vow to heaven I will remain here too. In a few minutes it will be too late to decide. Consider, thou wilt be enabled to avenge thyself on

the tyrant who hath ruined thy fortunes—thou wilt soon have power enough to demand my liberty—we shall both be free—thy daughter——”

“ My daughter !”

“ Lives ! and longs to clasp a father to her heart—for her sake fly.”

The Baron burst into tears, but they were tears of joy ; he raised his eyes to heaven, and his lips murmured the thanks of his grateful heart ; his pleasure was indescribable. He no longer resisted the pressing entreaties of De Clifforde, but with the greatest alacrity put on the disguise, giving Sir Arthur his doublet and cap.

While they were exchanging their garments, De Clifforde described as succinctly as possible all that had transpired since the Baron’s imprisonment, and particularly instructed him when and where he would find Walter in readiness to conduct him to his anxious and affectionate daughter, who still remained in the labyrinth not daring to venture forth, lest some of the King’s spies might recognise her and again subject her to the persecutions of John. By the care and industry of Walter and Gilbert, the place had been in a short time tolerably well provided with furniture and provisions, and Maude, Jaques, and Guy, were added to the number of her attendants.

Fitz-Walter had scarcely time to adjust his disguise, when the soldiers opened the door to warn them the time had elapsed. The friends spoke not a word, but embracing each other affectionately, they sepa-

rated. The door was closed upon Sir Arthur; he heard them fix the heavy bars and bolts, and the fast-decreasing sound of their receding footsteps filled him with hope. The Baron, unsuspected, slowly followed the soldiers, leaning on his staff. His heart beat quick, and he could scarce refrain from erecting his proud head and walking at a quicker rate. At last he gained the outer gate, bade them adieu! and was free!

CHAPTER XVI.

Let each man do his best : and here draw I
A sword.—

Henry IV.

SIR Eustace de Mountfort, notwithstanding the favourable reception he universally met with from the French nobility, began to sigh for England ; and was rather surprised the King had not long since recalled him, and the more so as he knew John was perfectly aware of the tender engagement which subsisted between Fitz-Walter's fair daughter and himself. He had not however the slightest suspicion of the cruel part which the King had acted towards the Baron in his absence, and of the specious kindness and duplicity with which he had behaved towards himself ; or, fired with indignation, he would have instantly quitted the French dominions, and called upon the Barons of England, with several of whom he was allied by blood, to aid him in avenging his and Fitz-Walter's wrongs.

The Marquise de St. Clair's importunities likewise served to perplex him ; the unblushing freedom with

which she made her advances, and her manners altogether differing so widely from his ideas of female excellence, completely disgusted him, and he marvelled how the Gallic knights, and more especially his friend De la Rosecœur, could be so blinded to her glaring imperfections as to stake his happiness on the smile of such a vain coquette. De la Rosecœur, however, was so infatuated with Clotilde that all the reasoning of his friend proved unavailing, and he still pursued the object of his adoration, as he used to term her, with unabated ardour.

“ Ah, my dear Eustace !” would De la Rosecœur reply to his arguments, “ the lady who hath possession of thy heart is so incomparable, that thou wilt not allow any charms to a woman who hath the misfortune to be only a whit inferior !”

“ Indeed, now, Rosecœur, thou wrong’st me ; I think the Marquise hardly inferior in personal attractions to Matilda the Fair.”

“ And hath she not wit ?” demanded De la Rosecœur.

“ She is satirical !”

“ Her manners are engaging ?”

“ So engaging, she hath all the knights and nobility of France eternally paying their devoirs at the shrine of her beauty !”

“ Ye gods ! Thou art a very cynic. Tell me, I prithee, if the Marquise equals thy fair and honoured lady in personal attractions — in what is she her inferior ?”

“ Clotilde seeks notoriety, and a thousand tongues breathing adulation feed her vanity ; Matilda shrinks modestly from public gaze, and finds an innocent pleasure in the conversation of her domestic circle. The actions, the parlance, and the manners of the one are formed by art ; the other is the simple child of nature.”

“ By Cupid ! a very paragon, Eustace ! a bouquet of beauties which deserves to be worn next thy heart ! The belle Marquise too hath beauty to feast the eye, and sprightliness and wit wherewith to charm the senses. A thousand lovers languish for her smiles, and if I perchance should be fortunate enough to bear away the prize, such a glorious conquest is worthy all my best endeavours.”

“ Ah, Rosecœur ! methinks vanity hath equal share with love in this amour.”

Conscious of the truth of this latter observation, De la Rosecœur turned the conversation to some less interesting subject.

Since the evening when the minions of Fiorenzi attacked De Mountfort, the Italian knight sedulously avoided meeting Sir Eustace, aware that he was suspected of being the instigator of the cowardly attempt upon his life. But to avoid De la Rosecœur was impossible, for he was as constant in attendance upon Clotilde as himself, and when De Mountfort was not there, received the greatest share of her attention. She knew him to be the sincere friend of the English envoy, and was pleased with his conversation, for he

had always some generous action to relate, or some excellent trait in his friend's character to describe ; and the Marquise esteemed him for his generosity in lauding one whom he must be convinced was his successful rival in her affections.

The haughty disposition of Fiorenzi could brook no rivalry, and he beheld with a jealous eye the enviable place which De la Rosecœur held in the Marquise's estimation ; and although he knew that Sir Eustace de Mountfort was her favourite, and prized by her far above any of her numerous suitors ; yet, he apprehended, on the English knight's departure, the Marquise would soon experience for the gallant De la Rosecœur those tender sentiments which, at present, she entertained for his friend ; and he placed too much reliance on De Mountfort's firmness and stability to believe even the dazzling charms of Clotilde could make him waver in his affections towards the lady of his heart. He therefore came to the resolution, before that event should take place, to secure the person of the Marquise. Ever fruitful in evil schemes, he soon formed a plan, and only waited a favourable opportunity to put it in execution.

At a splendid entertainment given by the Marquise at her château, where Sir Eustace de Mountfort and De la Rosecœur, with a number of the nobility of France were assembled, Fiorenzi, instead of absenting himself as usual when De Mountfort was of the party, appeared in an extraordinary splendid dress ; which, added to his really handsome person, rendered him the

most conspicuous character in the gay assembly. He appeared in high spirits, and danced and talked cheerfully with the ladies, who were all greatly pleased with his polite and agreeable manners, and none who witnessed his smiles and heard his witty sallies, could have supposed he possessed so bad a heart, or was capable of entertaining the most malignant hatred and a cruel thirst for revenge. He had resolved on this night of festivity and mirth to execute his scheme, totally regardless of that honour and gallantry which ought to be the most prominent characteristic of a true knight, and despising and setting at defiance every law which opposed his inclination.

During the amusements of the evening, a vassal announced to Sir Eustace that a messenger from his palace required to speak to him on business of importance. The messenger, who was covered with dust, and seemed much fatigued with his journey, informed the knight that a gentleman and his attendants were arrived at his palace, bearing despatches from the English court.

De Mountfort delighted with this intelligence, and hoping it might be an order from the King for his speedy return, commanded his men to attend him, and not wishing to disturb the harmony of the company by formally taking his leave, departed immediately, merely leaving a polite excuse to the Marquise for his hasty departure; recommending the weary messenger who had used such laudable diligence to the care of the Marquise's servants. Clotilde, who saw him quit

the ball-room so abruptly, began to be impatient at his prolonged stay, when her attendants informed her of his having quitted the château ; she was surprised and mortified at this occurrence, and the damp which it threw upon her spirits was visible to all the company. De Mountfort, she thought, had never before behaved with such marked attention towards her ; there was an unusual tenderness in all his words and actions, which flattered her that he began to conceive a mutual passion, and she was enjoying these gratifying thoughts when he was so suddenly called away. Her heart was sorely grieved, her agitation was extreme, and finding it impossible to refrain from tears, she hastily quitted the apartment with her page, unwilling to let the company witness her weakness. When arrived at the long corridor which led to her chamber, she bade her page return, and the moment she was alone, burst into a flood of tears, holding her kerchief to her face. The corridor was but faintly illumined by a lamp at each end, and she neither saw any person nor heard the approach of footsteps, nor did she expect any one would dare intrude in a place which was set apart for herself and women, and was much alarmed by a voice whispering close to her ear the words—“ De Mountfort ! The bower ! ” She turned quickly round to inquire the meaning, but the speaker had retreated, and she only caught a glimpse of a tall figure enveloped in a cloak rapidly descending the staircase. She was greatly perplexed at this circumstance, and remained several minutes unde-

cided, whether to proceed to her chamber or return to the company. The name of De Mountfort had had a wonderful effect upon her, she fancied she recognised his voice in that of the unknown, and his mention of the bower proved her suspicions well founded, for she had accidentally met De Mountfort there alone that very morning, and enjoyed a very agreeable dialogue. It instantly occurred to her that his sudden departure was a mere subterfuge, and that the gaiety of the scene and the kind, affable and encouraging manner in which she had behaved to him, had melted his heart to tenderness, and flattered herself he was about to avow a passion which had been her greatest ambition to inspire. *

There was not a moment to lose ; her friends would be surprised at her absence, and therefore, without further consideration, and with a palpitating heart and trembling steps, she hastened towards the bower ; a place which bore a greater resemblance to an elegant saloon, than the leafy retreat its name would denote, though it had only derived its appellation from its situation, being surrounded by tall, umbrageous trees and beautiful shrubs.

De la Rosecœur had observed the absence of Sir Eustace and the subsequent agitation of the fair Marquise, and waited her return with the utmost impatience and anxiety ; for he had remarked, with the most painful feelings, the unusual warmth with which De Mountfort had addressed her, and began to suspect that the fascinations of Clotilde, and the soft, inspiring

music which was continually playing during the evening, had conspired to render him forgetful of his friend, and faithless to his mistress.

Fiorenzi was the only one who appeared not to notice the absence of the mistress of the *fête*, and was apparently very pleasantly engaged with a charming young Duchess, who was listening with a smiling countenance to his complimentary language.

Suddenly, however, the harmony of the company was interrupted by the shrieks of the Marquise's women, who had vainly sought their mistress in every part of the château. The knights supposing, by the alarming outcry and confusion, that the place was attacked by banditti, and that the women were flying before them, immediately drew their swords, and prepared to defend their ladies; when the affrighted maidens, with dishevelled hair, and cheeks bedewed with tears, rushed in, and, with the most bitter lamentations, communicated the sorrowful tidings of the Marquise's mysterious disappearance. All her household was soon assembled, and dispersed with flambeaux in various directions, to search for her in the gardens and grounds surrounding the château, accompanied by the knights.

De la Rosecœur, much concerned at this event, chanced to direct his steps towards the bower; when, very near the saloon, he discovered, by the light of the flambeaux which the vassals carried, a superb brilliant cross lying in the pathway. He seized it,

and instantly recognised it as the one he had seen the Marquise wear that evening.

“ Ye gods !” exclaimed the distracted knight, holding up the cross, which the faithful vassals of the Marquise no sooner beheld, than they uttered a cry of horror ; “ what sad forebodings come across my mind !”

They immediately proceeded to the saloon, but there was no trace of her having been there, and the disconsolate De la Rosecœur returned with a heavy heart to the château, despatching the vassals who had accompanied him, to summon all those who were still engaged in the search, in order to impart to them his discovery and his suspicions, and to decide upon some plan to pursue and punish the ravishers ; for he had no doubt she had been carried off by force. The first thing they did when they returned, and learned from De la Rosecœur the alarming and suspicious result of his search, was to examine all the vassals, to know if there were any of them absent, or in anywise concerned in the affair, but not a man was missing, nor could the slightest suspicion be attached to any of them.

None of them were more diligent in the scrutiny than Fiorenzi, whose activity was remarkable. One of the knights observed, that the English ambassador was not among them.

“ Ah !” exclaimed Fiorenzi, with well feigned surprise, as if he had not noticed De Mountfort’s absence before ; “ who hath seen his excellency ?”

A vassal stepped forward, and informed them of the reason of his departure.

“ And where is his messenger ?” demanded Fiorenzi. “ Send him hither ; we would have a word or two with him.”

“ Thou dost not surely suspect Sir Eustace of any connivance in this affair ?” said the generous De la Rosecœur, rather warmly ; although his heart confessed the grievous truth, that appearances were much against his friend, and he dreaded the confirmation of his suspicions.

“ Sir Knight !” replied Fiorenzi, firmly—“ it behoveth us to leave no means untried to discover the Marquise de St. Clair. His excellency himself, I am convinced, would pardon my suspicion ; for none will shrink from our rigid scrutiny, but those who are culpable.”

All applauded the crafty Italian for his bold and impartial conduct. De la Rosecœur was silent and covered with confusion, for all eyes were upon him ; Fiorenzi’s words having certainly glanced at him, though expressed in a manner which precluded any reply.

The messenger was brought in, but in such a state of inebriation, that he could scarcely stand. His cheeks were flushed, and he stared with open eyes at the gay assembly, hiccupping and wavering to and fro.

“ Sirrah !” said Fiorenzi—“ thou art one of the English ambassador’s menials ; art thou not ?”

“ No—no—my—my Lord,” replied the fellow.

“ No!” thundered out Fiorenzi—“ what art thou, then?”

“ A woo—woodcutter, my Lord!”

“ A woodcutter! Scoundrel!” exclaimed the Italian, seizing the terrified fellow by the collar, and shaking him. “ Wilt thou deny that thou didst bring a message to the ambassador an hour since?”

“ No—I—I did ——” answered the woodcutter, falling on his knees; “ I—I—did.”

And after a great deal of stammering, hiccupping, and circumlocution, they gained from him, that some knight, unknown to him, for he wore his vizor down, had met him in the forest in the morning, while employed in his daily avocation, and, after a little conversation, asked him, if he had any objection to assist in a joke, which he and several other knights intended to put upon the English ambassador; and he, supposing it some harmless frolic, and much inclined by the offer of a well-laden bourse, readily acceded to the knight’s proposals, and forthwith received instructions in what manner to make his appearance, which he punctually followed.

As the simple woodcutter concluded, he pulled an empty crimson bourse, embroidered with gold, from the breast of his doublet, and offering it to the Italian,

“ There—there, my Lord,” cried he; “ there be the skin o’the coin!”

"Ah!" said Fiorenzi, starting — "What do I see?"

"By St. Denis!" exclaimed De la Rosecœur, with horror, " 'tis De Mountfort's!"

"De Mountfort's!" echoed a hundred voices, with astonishment, crowding round the man, eager to examine the bourse.

"What think ye now, my friends?" said Fiorenzi, with a tone of exultation,— "Hath my suspicion wronged the English knight? But we have no time to descant upon his actions," continued he, drawing his sword—"let us pursue the ravisher; and remember, he whose good fortune leads him front to front with this Englishman, may chance to win the fair—a glorious prize. So, gallant knights, I wish ye all farewell. We each will take a different route."

Fiorenzi departed, and the rest of the knights followed; each choosing the course which he hoped and thought De Mountfort had most probably taken.

There was little chance, however, of any of them discovering the Marquise, for the minions of Fiorenzi, who had planned the whole of this conspiracy, and, unfortunately, succeeded so well, had seized Clotilde in the garden, when on her way to the bower, hastening, as she supposed, to meet the beloved De Mountfort. Already greatly agitated at the idea of granting the knight an interview at such an hour, and in such a place, she swooned away the instant the villains seized her. Throwing a cloak over her to conceal

her dress from observation, then strapping her safely behind one of their comrades on a fleet horse, and mounting their own, they soon left the château far behind them, and, in a few hours, gained an old castle several leagues distant, which belonged to Fiorenzi.

CHAPTER XVII.

Sic. Pass no farther.

Cor. Ha ! what is that ?

Brut. It will be dangerous to

Go on ; no farther. — *Coriolanus.*

NOTWITHSTANDING appearances were so much against De Mountfort, for he was generally suspected, blackened by the artful insinuations of the Italian, to have himself employed the ignorant woodcutter, merely as a blind ; and had purposely left him behind, supposing that, being a stranger, he would certainly be interrogated when the absence of the Marquise was discovered, and his simple answers serve to turn the course of their suspicions ; yet De la Rosecœur, although so deeply enamoured, could hardly suppose his friend guilty of such an outrage, nor could he bring himself to join in the clamour which was raised so readily against the English knight, and conjectured that the bitterness of their invectives was excited by feelings of envy and jealousy, rather than indignation. The prominent part which Fiorenzi had taken, excited his suspicion. Besides, upon reflection, he considered

that, if Sir Eustace really wished to obtain Clotilde, he would have had no occasion to resort to force ; her affection for him being evident to every observer, even less interested in her sentiments than himself.

The result of these reflections was, a determination to proceed directly to the English ambassador's palace, and learn whether he had been the dupe of some artifice, which he now shrewdly suspected was the case, or was really concerned in the Marquise's disappearance.

The lively twittering and chirping of the birds, as De la Rosecœur passed through the forest with his retinue, announced the near approach of day. He pressed forward with all possible speed, and after an hour's ride, emerged from the obscurity of the forest, and beheld the ruddy orb of day just rising above the hills. He turned his eyes from the contemplation of this celestial source of lights, aroused by the voice of his squire, who pointed out to him a body of men who were in the midst of the extensive plain which lay before them, and appeared galloping towards them.

“ St. Denis !” exclaimed the knight, surprised at the martial appearance which they bore, for they were all armed with targe, lance, and helm ; but desirous of ascertaining the cause of this array, he spurred on his steed without making any farther remark, and soon met them.

“ Ah, Rosecœur !” cried their leader, raising his vizor ; the French knight instantly recognising his friend De Mountfort. “ Whither so early ?”

"I may repeat the same question," replied the other. "I was on my way to thy palace."

"Indeed! Why, thou hast not been duped, too, hast thou? Hath any messenger whispered in thine ear, that some lovesick damoiselle——"

"Spare thy jesting, Eustace," said De la Rosecœur, with a serious air, "and tell me, if thou know'st ought of the Marquise de St. Clair?"

The tone with which he spoke this, had the effect of repressing the mirth which was sparkling in the eyes of Sir Eustace, whose tongue was ready to give utterance to a burst of raillery on the unwonted solidity of De la Rosecœur's countenance.

"The Marquise?" cried he. "By St. George!—no—why—how—what hath occurred?"

"The mystery is unveiled!" exclaimed De la Rosecœur, knitting his brows and gnashing his teeth, without noticing De Mountfort's anxious inquiry.—"That cursed Italian is at the bottom of this. Ah! fair Clotilde, I vow, by the holy Virgin, I will not sheathe my glaive till I have avenged thee!"

"A' God's name, what is the meaning of all this?" demanded Sir Eustace, impatiently.

"No less than this, De Mountfort; that villain, that archdevil, Fiorenzi, hath carried off the Marquise—hath vilely calumniated thy fair name, and cast upon thee the odium of this foul deed; and is now, perhaps, rejoicing in the success of his schemes. But his exultation shall be of short duration. Join thy forces to mine, my dear friend, and let us hunt

down this monster in human shape. Let us on, and heaven direct our steps!"

Then, wheeling round, they retraced their way through the forest. On the road, De la Rosecœur recounted all that had transpired at the château, to the astonishment of Sir Eustace, who expressed the greatest indignation at the aspersions cast upon him by Fiorenzi; and, in his turn, informed his friend, that having gained his palace, and discovered that the intelligence which the messenger had brought him was a mere fabrication, resolved to return directly to the château, and endeavour to learn the cause of this stratagem; and, first arming himself and his followers, set forth, and had commenced his journey about half an hour, when they met on the plain. They soon arrived at the château, which presented the most deplorable and deserted appearance, for most of the domestics had joined in the pursuit of their mistress, and every thing remained in the same order, or rather disorder, in which the company had left it the preceding evening.

Finding that no tidings had been received of the Marquise, the two friends sallied without delay from the gates of the château, and followed in the direction which one of Clotilde's vassals informed them he believed Fiorenzi had taken. They journeyed on the whole day through an immense forest, without discovering any thing but a few peasants', or hunters' huts; and from none of the inhabitants could they gain the least information relative to the object of

their search. They began to fear they had mistaken the route, and the loud and grievous lamentations of De la Rosecœur wounded De Mountfort to the heart; and he used all the eloquence and persuasion he was master of to console his friend, but in vain. At length evening came on, and they were obliged to halt; for the men having ridden hard since break of day, were completely fatigued, some of them having actually fallen asleep on the saddle, and their steeds, too, were weary, and unable to proceed farther. They dismounted in an open space in the forest, which had been apparently cleared by some woodmen for the erection of their huts, and, spreading their cloaks, produced from their wallets what provisions they had brought with them, and eat their repast in silence; for the gloomy countenances and woful ejaculations of their masters, prevented them from enjoying any mirthful conversation, though, from excessive drowsiness, they were more inclined to sleep than talk. After they had satisfied the cravings of hunger, and emptied some flasks of wine, they enveloped themselves in their ample cloaks, and stretching themselves out at full length, the world and all its troubles, their master's and their own, were soon forgotten in the oblivion of sleep.

The knights were too uneasy to join in the repast, and felt equally indisposed to rest; and were determined, after the men and cattle were recovered a little from their fatigue, to set forth again; meantime,

endeavouring to while away the tedious hours with various and wild conjectures. De Mountfort always placing the affair in the most favourable light which circumstances would admit of.

The sun had sunk below the horizon, and the twinkling stars began gradually to peep forth and adorn the dark-blue sky, and the melodious and mournful notes of the nightingale echoed through the forest. At any other time this scene would have afforded the highest gratification to De la Rosecœur and his friend, but all other feelings were absorbed in the painful reflection, that the Marquise was, perhaps, at that moment in the power of Fiorenzi.

They had been in this retired situation about half an hour, when they were startled by the sudden appearance of a horseman, who rode into the midst of them at full gallop.

“ Holla!” cried De Mountfort, rising from the stump on which he had been seated, and approaching the horseman.

“ Whence in such haste?” exclaimed De la Rosecœur, in the same breath, following Sir Eustace.

The horseman, apparently confused at meeting company so unexpectedly in such a place, reined in his steed, and, without making any reply, wheeled round; but his intention of escaping was frustrated, for several of the men, awoken by the noise of the horse’s hoofs, and the voices of their masters, arose and surrounded the intruder in a moment.

"Why dost thou fly so fearfully from us, stranger, and disdain to answer our interrogatories?" asked De la Rosecœur.

"I am a traveller," replied the man, muffling himself in his cloak to conceal his features from observation; "I am going upon business of importance, and every moment is precious."

The knights conversed apart for some time, and then De la Rosecœur addressed him in the following words:

"We would not willingly detain thee, but thy appearance and conduct is mysterious; nor can the occasion of thy journey be of such importance as thou say'st, for thou art unattended; and why attempt to return in lieu of continuing thy course when thou didst behold us?"

"We are likewise upon business of vital consequence," added De Mountfort; "and thy demeanour is such as requires examination on our part, ere we let thee pass."

The man was confounded, and remained mute, nor offered the least resistance, although, indeed, such on his part would have been the extreme of folly.

"Come, despatch!" cried Gervais, De la Rosecœur's squire, assisting him to dismount—"Come, come; a moment agone thou wert in such a devil of a hurry thou could'st not tarry to change a word, and now, forsooth, thou mov'st like ———"—the stranger had now dismounted, and his cloak no longer concealed his face—"the devil!" exclaimed Gervais, holding him at arms length.

“ The devil?” cried his comrades, drawing back, seeming to feel no inclination to get in the clutches of his satanic majesty.

“ No!—but ‘tis one of his imps, though,” continued the squire.

“ Dost thou know him?” demanded his master, impatiently.

“ Well, Sir Knight! ‘Tis one of the Marquise’s domestics.”

Several of the others, now drawing near and regarding him closely, recognised him instantly.

“ Darest thou assert ———” cried the man, with indignation.

“ Nay, hold thy peace, varlet,” said Gervais, interrupting him—“ for an thou giv’st me the lie, I’ll cut thy wezon for thee; I know thee well, Pozzi.”

“ Holy Virgin!” exclaimed De la Rosecœur, when he heard who the stranger was, and seizing him by the throat—“ What is the meaning of this concealment? Why art thou journeying this way so late, and with such haste? I am convinced by thy hesitation, thou lying knave, thou art concerned with thy countryman Fiorenzi, and know’st where he lies hid. Say, where is thy fair mistress, or I will presently lay thee lifeless at my feet.”

“ I am guilty—I confess—but spare my life,” cried Pozzi, happy to be released from the grasp of the knight, which had nearly strangled him, “ and I will guide you to the castle, where you will find both my Lady and Fiorenzi.”

This confession so enraged *De la Rosecœur*, that he would have inevitably sacrificed the perfidious culprit, forgetting in his anger, that by his means alone, perhaps he could discover his mistress, if Sir Eustace had not, perforce, restrained and dissuaded him from such an act, showing him the ill consequences which would ensue ; and having effectually pacified his friend, he gave orders to his men to mount immediately, and keeping strict guard over *Pozzi*, they followed the road he pointed out.

When the russians arrived at *Fiorenzi's* castle with *Clotilde*, they resigned their charge to the care of a haggard old woman and her daughter, the latter about thirty, who came to the gate to receive her ; but the Marquise was so weak and fatigued by the expedition of the journey, and by the painful position in which she had ridden, being so tightly strapped that it occasioned her considerable pain, that she could scarcely stand, and they were obliged to carry her in their arms. They bore her into a very elegant and spacious chamber, and laid her on a velvet couch. The old woman having administered a cordial, and proper restoratives, in about an hour, by the united efforts of herself and daughter, the Marquise was completely recovered and enabled to reply to the garrulous old woman, whose tongue run on unceasingly from the moment the men departed, landing in the most fulsome and ridiculous language her good lord.

“ And who is thy lord, woman ? ” demanded *Clotilde*, sitting upright upon the couch. The com-

manding air and sudden manner in which she uttered these words startled the woman.

“ Madame,” replied the mother, making a low curtsy, “ Antonio Fiorenzi, so please ye Madame.”

“ And has Fiorenzi had the audacity to force me away in this shameful manner ?”

“ Love, Madame——”

“ Silence, woman,” said the Marquise sternly, interrupting the daughter, “ darest thou offend my ears by mentioning the love of such an artful villain. Where are the men who brought me hither ? Bid them mount their horses and bear me back again, and I will give them twenty times what they receive from their ungallant, unmanly employer.”

Both the women assured her they dared not for their lives ; nor could all the menaces and threats of Clotilde influence them to listen to her, even supplication would have been useless, but the lovely Marquise was too haughty to stoop to beg a favour of such menials, and perceiving they were proof against all her offers, she commanded them to intrude no longer upon her, but leave her to repose.

They retired without daring to oppose her will, and she heard them draw the bolts ; she arose, and seeing there were also fastenings on the inside, made the door secure to prevent any intrusion, and casting herself upon the couch, soon closed her eyes in sleep ; for she had undergone so much fatigue within the last four hours, that she found it utterly impossible to resist the impulse of exhausted nature.

Clotilde, indignant at the insult which had been offered her by forcing her away from amidst her friends, only meditated vengeance upon the head of Fiorenzi, without harbouring the least fear in her breast on account of the imminent danger which threatened her ; in fact, she was not aware of it, and believed, so accustomed had she always been to bear the sway and see every one yield to her most trifling wishes, that the Italian would not dare to detain her against her inclination, and that a single frown would deter him from offering any further insult, and repenting of what he had done under the influence of passion, he would cast himself at her feet a suppliant for her forgiveness ! Such were the reflections of the Marquise, but she knew not the heart of Antonio Fiorenzi. She was aroused from her slumbers by a loud knocking, and on opening her eyes perceived the chamber was in total darkness ; she turned towards the window and beheld the stars—it was evening. She had enjoyed a long and refreshing sleep. She arose, and the knocking was again repeated.

“ Who’s there ?” demanded the Marquise.

“ Thy slave, Fiorenzi ! Wilt thou deny me——”

“ Nay, most gallant knight,” replied she ironically, “ I desire to see thee !” and, unfastening the door, he entered ; the women following with lights, which having disposed in their proper place, they quitted the apartment. Fiorenzi threw himself at the Marquise’s feet—she drew back with a look of the most profound contempt.

“ Fair Clotilde !” exclaimed the knight, “ I deserve all thy anger, for the rash unpardonable step I have taken; I know it. I love thee—Oh ! have loved thee long. I saw thee surrounded by a crowd of admirers, and I feared to lose thee——”

“ Fiorenzi, let me hear no more of this ;” said the Marquise, “ whatever may have been thy reason for this flagrant behaviour, I desire thou wilt no longer hold me a prisoner here. Nay, all expostulation or excuse is vain,” continued she, seeing he was about to reply.

“ Sweet lady !” cried Fiorenzi, in a supplicating tone.

“ Insult me not with thy professions of love ; for know, I never esteemed thee, Fiorenzi—and the disrespect with which thou hast treated me, makes me now abhor thee.”

“ Indeed !” exclaimed Fiorenzi rising, stung to the quick by this language, “ these airs, Clotilde,” added he, “ might become thee perhaps when surrounded by thy suitors in thine own palace ; but, remember, thou art now in my power, and this unbending pride and haughty demeanour suits not my present disposition. Thou dost forget, Madam, thou art my prisoner !”

“ Despicable wretch !” cried the Marquise, her bosom heaving and her lovely eyes flashing with indignation ; “ darest thou threaten me ? Thou think’st perhaps I’ll beg my liberty, and weep and wail, and woo thee with my tears, but no—I will not shed a single tear ; for I cannot forget, Fiorenzi, I am the

Marquise de St. Clair! A hundred knights at my command would raise their glaives and lay thee with the dust; yet would I not they should stain their swords with the base, degenerate, and ignoble blood of such a man, whom, in coping with, my meanest thrall would think his honour tarnish'd!"

While the Marquise was thus giving vent to her rage, Fiorenzi, unmoved by the bitterness of her language, stood silently gazing upon her with the utmost coolness, and when she had concluded, replied with an affected laugh:—

" And prithee where are these same faithful men ? Dost think, Clotilde, thy bloodhounds will scent me, and attack me in my own den, and hunt me through the woods like a wild boar ? Come, come, fair lady, and now this storm of anger hath passed away, we'll e'en sit down in peace, and converse of love, and spend the hours in amorous dalliance !"

And drawing the struggling Marquise to the couch, he held her fast upon his knee, saluting her lips, which grew pale and trembled with anger at this insult. Releasing her right arm, she made a grasp at his poignard, and drew it from the sheath. He quitted his hold and started from the brandished weapon, but not before the terrified and exasperated Marquise had inflicted a deep wound in his arm.

" Hell and fury !" roared the wounded Italian, stamping with the pain, and advancing to wrest the poignard from her hold. She struggled, but her

strength was weak indeed opposed to his, and she shrieked aloud for help. A noise of approaching footsteps was heard, in an instant the door flew open, and De la Rosecœur, sword in hand, followed by De Mountfort and his vassals, rushed into the apartment. But he beheld a sight which chilled his blood with horror. The beautiful Marquise de St. Clair was lying senseless and bleeding upon the ground, the paleness of death was upon her countenance, and her eyes were closed. In her struggles she had either purposely or accidentally pierced herself in the left breast. Fiorenzi held the bloody poignard in his hand.

“Murderer!”—cried De la Rosecœur in agony, pressing furiously upon Fiorenzi, who had scarcely time to defend himself. Despair lent strength to the arm of the young knight, and his avenging sword soon pierced the heart of the base Italian.

They raised the body of the Marquise.

“Life is not yet extinct!”—cried the French knight, a ray of hope cheering his melancholy countenance: “Guards, release those women,” continued he to his men, who had captured and bound the old beldame and her daughter, and brought them into the apartment. The terrified women tremblingly obeyed his commands, and rendered their assistance in staunching the blood. By the direction of the old woman, Gervais was despatched to a monastery about half a league distant, to call in the aid of a reverend

father, who was skilled in chirurgery. Selecting two of their fleetest horses, Gervais in a short time returned with the monk, to the great joy of De la Roseœur. On entering the apartment the monk found Clotilde much recovered, by the care and assiduity of the women, who fearing the vengeance of the knight if she should expire, had therefore exerted their utmost endeavours, hoping in the event of her recovery, to escape the punishment which they so justly merited.

At the expiration of five or six days, during which time the monk at the pressing solicitation of De la Roseœur, took up his abode in the castle, the knight had the felicity of hearing that the Marquise's wound was completely healed, and her health nearly re-established.

But all that wit and vivacity which formerly so distinguished the lovely Marquise, gave place to a languor and placid serenity bordering on melancholy. The trial which she had undergone, her subsequent reflections, and the pious conversation of the benevolent monk, had extinguished every spark of pride in her bosom, and as before she had been haughty and overbearing, she was now mild and humble.

She returned to her château as soon as her health would permit her removal, from a spot where she had experienced so much danger and trouble; but she wished for retirement, and refused to see many of her former friends and acquaintance. From the sen-

timents of gratitude which she owed her deliverers De la Rosecœur and De Mountfort, she could not deny them her presence, though from feelings of delicacy towards his friend, the English knight appeared as rarely as possible at the château. One day when De la Rosecœur was sitting alone with the Marquise, he seized the opportunity to press his suit in the most delicate manner.

“Thou know’st, De la Rosecœur,” said she, and paused in confusion, her pallid cheek tinged with blushes, “I—I—have loved thy friend De Mountfort—and can’t thou forget my behaviour towards him; how ungenerously I have essayed to wile away his heart from its rightful possessor by every allurement in my power? Hast thou forgotten, too, how I have slighted thee?”

“Oh! say not so, Clotilde; thou hast always treated me as a friend at least, and can I blame thee for loving De Mountfort, whom, for his goodness and excellence, I have ever loved myself,” replied De la Rosecœur, delighted with this candid confession of her faults, and presaging the happiest consequences to himself.

“If my hand, accompanied by the sincerest gratitude and esteem,—’tis all that I can give,—be worthy thy acceptance, take it, De la Rosecœur!” said the Marquise.

De la Rosecœur, agreeably surprised and agitated by such unexpected success, took her offered hand

and saluted it. With a heart overflowing with love, and a thousand blissful and indefinable sensations, he expressed his gratitude in the warmest terms for this enviable favour, hoping hereafter, by his assiduity and love, to gain her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

What ! stand'st thou still, and hear'st
Such a calling ? Look to the guests
Within.—

BARON Fitz-Walter gained the appointed place, where he was to meet Walter, without impediment ; and found the faithful fellow waiting his appearance in the most torturing suspense. The moment Walter heard his voice, he recognised him, and, falling down, embraced his knees, while tears of joy trickled down his cheeks, and a grateful exclamation of—" Thank heaven!" burst from his lips. Without further delay, he led the Baron through the labyrinth to the subterranean apartment of his fair daughter. It is impossible to describe the mutual bliss of their meeting. Fitz-Walter held in his embrace what most he loved on earth ; he had mourned her as dead, and she now lived again in all her loveliness and innocence. These happy moments cast all their past sorrow and misfortunes in oblivion ; they forgot that they had suffered.

The Baron was not, however, so ungrateful as to forget, amid the pleasing hours which passed in his

beloved Matilda's company, the means by which he was enabled to enjoy that felicity ; for he was aware that De Clifford had not only lost his liberty by this act of friendship, but, in all probability, in the event of discovery, would forfeit his life. Fitz-Walter therefore resolved, immediately to quit London, and in person call upon his brother Barons to avenge his injuries ; and, by their intercession, obtain the release of De Clifford. He thought it advisable to let Matilda still remain in concealment, till it should be in his power to reinstate her in the situation, and all the honours, which were due to her high birth and beauty.

The Barons were greatly surprised at the re-appearance of Fitz-Walter, for it had been generally reported and believed, that both he and his daughter were buried in the ruins of Castle Baynard. Yet, although they had been so very backward, and reprehensible in passing over in silence an outrage which had been committed against one of their body, supposing he had fallen a sacrifice to the King's unjustifiable vengeance ; yet, when they beheld Fitz-Walter again, and heard from the lips of the ancient warrior and staunch patriot, the relation of the many wrongs which had been heaped upon him, they felt his cause their own ; and, rebuking themselves for their former remissness, they determined to make him ample amends, by promptly assembling their forces, and demanding reparation of John for the injuries he had sustained. Indeed, latterly, the actions of the King

had been marked by such unwarrantable tyranny and oppression, that not only the Barons, but the whole nation began to murmur loudly at his infringement of their rights and privileges, for which the Barons had long meditated a sharp reproof, and found at once a ready leader in the person of Fitz-Walter.

His unshaken firmness in every trial, and the coolness, wisdom, and policy, which he had so often and ably exhibited in council, added to the impression his own wrongs had made upon his mind, gave them every reason to believe they could place the utmost reliance upon him.

Sir Richard Falconberg, a relation of Matilda's, by her mother's side, when informed that his fair cousin was still living, and the dismal place in which she was immured, proposed to take her under his protection, and Fitz-Walter readily accepted the offer of the old knight, knowing that the amiable Lady Falconberg was a great favourite with Matilda, and despatched Jaques to London, with particular instructions in what manner best to elude observation in their flight. The gay Frenchman was heartily delighted with a mission which promised so speedily to re-unite him to his pretty Maude, to whom he was more attached than ever.

When Jaques arrived in London it was mid-day, and he was therefore obliged to saunter about the city for several hours, till the shades of night came on to favour his visit to the ruins. Although not apprehensive of any mischief arising from recognition by

any of the citizens, who were most of them too much attached to the unfortunate Fitz-Walter to betray him; yet, to avoid all suspicion, Monsieur Jaques had wisely exchanged the Baron's rich livery for a plain common suit, and by these means passed many of his old acquaintances, who, on account of this change in his exterior, and the supposition, that he was either dead or had returned to his native clime, did not recognise him. He was highly delighted, however, when coming from the chapel, which, at that period, stood on the centre arch of London-bridge, dedicated to Thomas à Becket, he perceived the Gosling conversing with a water-carrier, who was laughing heartily, either at something Gilbert was telling him, or at his ludicrous manner of relating it, with his curious iron-bound wooden tankard full of water, which he had just dipped from the river, standing beside him. This man was one of those, who were generally employed by the citizens to fetch water; for the modern convenience of having it laid on, or brought to our very houses, was then unknown, nor was it till the reign of John's successor, that conduits were erected, which, on account of the brooks, bournes, and rivulets, which ran through divers parts of the city, and from which the inhabitants had, till then, drawn their supplies, being gradually built over, became very useful. The water was first conveyed from a large conduit at Tyburn, supplying, by means of leaden pipes, a number of smaller ones; the principal of which was in Cheapside. Although, on ac-

count of the city's proximity to the Thames, there was always a good supply of water; contributing greatly to the health and cleanliness of the citizens.

Gilbert noticed Jaques as he passed, and, hastily bidding good-day to the water-carrier, ran after him. When mutual inquiries had passed between them, Jaques informed him of the purport of his sudden return.

"Well, now," said the Gosling with his usual mildness of expression, "I am pleased at this, for I am sure my lady mistress, Matilda, is quite moped in that dark and dismal place; though she saith she be happy now her father's escaped, I oftentimes do hear her sigh."

"Ah!—Ah!"—cried Jaques with a curious nasal sound, nodding and winking significantly at his companion, "C'est l'am—dat is lofe, mon bon ami—elle soupire—she sigh pour le Chevalier De Mountfort—bel homme! Ah! dis lofe," added he sighing, "mon cœur is tore into mille pieces by dis lofe!"

Conversing together they both proceeded to the house of Gilbert's mother, who received Monsieur Jaques very kindly, and they remained there till night, when taking the nearest way they soon reached the ruins.

Before they could approach the chamber which was inhabited by Matilda, they had to pass through the one occupied by her faithful adherents; they tapped at the door, which was cautiously opened by Walter. None of them had retired to rest, and therefore

Jaques was immediately admitted into the presence of Matilda, to whom he communicated the Baron's wishes, but they were not received with the pleasure he expected; for indeed Matilda would have preferred remaining in her present seclusion, to risking her safety by quitting it, till her father should be reinstated in his power, and be enabled to protect her from all harm; and it was only with the greatest reluctance that she obeyed the commands of her father. Gilbert and Jaques had provided proper disguises, and it being incumbent on them to escape from the labyrinth under the favourable obscurity of night, they forthwith arrayed themselves in their allotted garments. Apprehensive if they quitted their hiding place in a body, they might excite suspicion, or provoke inquiry, which would endanger their safety, it was ultimately decided that Lady Matilda and Walter should precede the others a short while, and await their arrival at the house of Gilbert's mother which was to be the place of general rendezvous. The tears trembled in the blue eyes of Matilda when she bade a reluctant adieu to the place which had offered her so secure an asylum in the hour of danger, and attended by Walter, happily reached their destination without encountering any difficulty, and soon after had the pleasure of seeing the rest enter the humble dwelling, within a short interval of each other. Early the next morning, as soon as the city gates were open, Gilbert procured horses, and they set off for Falconberg Castle. The gentle Ma-

tilda, as may easily be conceived, felt the greatest alarm at the idea of being recognised by any enemy of her father's house, as she passed through the streets of the city ; she fortunately was an excellent equestrian, and no sooner had they passed the walls, than spurring on their steeds they flew swiftly along, and in proportion as they receded from London, their fears diminished ; yet, notwithstanding the speed with which they travelled, not even stopping for refreshment, the night came on ere they had advanced more than two thirds of their journey. They were, however, too distant from London to fear being known, and much fatigued they halted at the first hosterie which presented itself.

“ Holla—house—holla !” bawled Walter, and the host instantly made his appearance. “ Can'st thou accommodate a few hungry travellers, and their nags with a little provender ?” said he ; “ We have empty stomachs and full bourses ; an thou'l^t assist us to fill the one and satisfy our craving, we will in good will empty the other to satisfy thine !”

The host perceiving there was such a goodly party, and pleased with Walter's frankness and his terms, replied with pardonably vanity, that they could not possibly have pitched upon a house where they would meet with such excellent accommodation, and assisting them to dismount, and leaving a man in care of their weary and jaded beasts, he led them into a spacious room, where there was a cheering fire blazing on the hearth. In the course of a quarter of an hour

the diligent host placed before his famished guests a substantial supper, consisting of rabbits, leverets, and fowls, to which without ceremony they fell to, and did ample justice. Walter and Guy between every mouthful, laughing and cracking their jokes, and lauding in the most jocose manner the various delicacies on the board, to the great delight of the host, who being himself a good humoured fellow and fond of a joke, mightily enjoyed their mirth; even Matilda whose anxiety had now entirely subsided, joined in the conversation, and enjoyed this excellent repast, with as much appetite and relish as her followers.

“An thy malt be as good as thy meal,” quoth Guy, “I’ll dub thee an incomparable man. So bring me a horn, mine host, that I may sound thy praise.”

“Foregad!” cried Walter, smacking his lips, and brandishing the drumstick of a capon, “in all my born days I have never fallen foul of such good fare, or fared so well on fowl before. Eating is the only thing, I take it, which doth not improve by practice, for the longer a man fasts and keeps his jaws unemployed, the more expert and irresistible he becomes in an assault upon a well-laden trencher.”

“It glads me to see thee fare well,” replied the host, who at this moment returned with a pitcher of foaming ale, which he poured out with an agreeable gurgling sound into several horns, handing two of them with a smirking countenance to Matilda and her maid.

“Thou dost well to say farewell, mine host, for

thou see'st I'm on the wing ;" said Walter, holding up that part of the fowl upon the point of his knife.

In this merry humour they despatched their supper, and the host not being able to provide them with beds, they bade him pile some fresh logs upon the hearth, resolved to pass away the time in conversation till day-break. The host was so much pleased with his guests, that he begged permission to remain with them ; and he, from his assiduity and politeness, having also become a mutual favourite with them, they granted his flattering request with pleasure. Edward, however, could not refrain from sleep ; his fatigue and subsequent hearty supper uniting to render him drowsy, and finding it impossible to resist the overpowering inclination, he enveloped himself in his cloak, and stretching himself at full length on a bench, soon fell into a sound slumber. About an hour elapsed in the most social and agreeable manner, when they were all suddenly startled in the midst of their merriment and conviviality by the clattering of horses' hoofs succeeded by a loud rapping and hallooing at the door.

" By'r lady, here's a hurly burly!" exclaimed the host pettishly, chagrined at being interrupted at this unseasonable hour, and rising to open the door.

" Well—well—I'm coming—coming!" roared he with all his might, as the impatient applicants increased their clamorous demands for admittance.

" Hell and the devil!" exclaimed a soldier in a gruff blustering tone, bouncing in with an air of consequence ; " Thou butt-bellied ale-soaker, are these

thy manners to keep me and my troopers bawling and battering at thy portal? Know, sirrah, we are upon the King's affairs; so, dost hear, bring us of thy best; and see the beasts have a feed of corn, for we have no time to spare. Despatch, and thou shalt be amply repaid—with the gratification of knowing thou hast had Captain Borlais and his troopers under the roof of thy miserable hovel!"

The host was burning with indignation at the brutal behaviour and insulting language of this ruffian, but fearful of arousing his anger by murmurs in reply, he obeyed his commands with as much celerity as the agitation into which he was thrown would allow; hoping that he should be the sooner quit of such unwelcome visitors.

The person of Captain Borlais was equally uncouth and repulsive as his boisterous demeanour. He was stout, and his limbs firm and well set. In his eye there was a continual roving and wildness, which inspired an idea of a restless and suspicious disposition, which, added to the scowling of his bushy brows, and his short black curly hair and beard, gave him the appearance of a cruel heartless tyrant.

The supercilious tone in which he delivered his commands to the terrified host, and the sneering manner in which he informed him he would be "amply repaid," exhibited him in the most contemptible light, and created in the minds of his auditors the most unqualified disgust.

Without deigning to take the least notice of the

company, who more from alarm than motives of politeness arose on his first entrance, Borlais drew the stool, which the host had occupied so happily a few minutes before, close to the fire, knocking about the burning logs with the point of his sword. Guy recollected the Captain's features the instant he beheld him, and remained silent lest his voice should be recognised; for, during Borlais' stay at Castle Baynard, where he had been entertained as one of the King's suite, my Lord of misrule had passed some very severe jokes upon his rude unpolished manners, holding him up to the ridicule of his fellows, which, notwithstanding his privilege in capacity of jester, would certainly have met with chastisement from the morose Captain, if fear of giving offence to Baron Fitz-Walter, who then appeared so great a favourite with the King, had not restrained him. Maude clung close to her dear mistress, and both equally terrified, concealed their pale fearful faces beneath the hoods of their riding cloaks, withdrawing as far from the light of the fire as the limits of the place would allow; Walter and his companions placing themselves in such a position before them as they hoped would conceal them from the observation of the troopers, who, to the number of twenty, now entered the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

Stand fast, good friends ;
What we lack in number, that have we in courage.

THE host produced the cold scraps and remnants of the supper, adding what else his larder contained, for the entertainment of Borlais and his men. Instead of such a scanty and miserable repast as this afforded them, a little civility on the part of the Captain would have ensured them an excellent supper ; for the obliging host would in a short time have warmed and dished up the victuals in a more inviting manner, in lieu of which he assumed an appearance of willing obedience and servile attention to his guests, which ill accorded with his real feelings. With many oaths they fell to, and soon despatched their spare and slender meal ; the host's excellent ale began to circulate freely, and its cheering and enlivening effects were visible in every countenance, as well as in their rude good humour and coarse jokes ; and now, for the first time, they began to take notice of the other inmates of the hostelrie, asking them to partake in a social cup.

“ I have no objection to wet my whistle, gentlemen !” replied Walter in his usual merry strain, ignorant of Guy’s fears, and merely acquiescing in their request as he was apprehensive of giving offence by a refusal.

“ A humoursome fellow, by the rood !” exclaimed one of the men, pleased with a disposition so consonant with their present feelings.

“ I fear me,” replied Walter, drawing near the board, and taking a horn of ale—“ thou’lt find me a dry fellow, too, in the matter o’ drinking.”

“ A good joke !” said the man, who had before noticed Walter.

“ A damned joke !” cried Borlais, in a surly tone—“ I hate jokes. Give me a man that speaks plain and downright ; none of your double meanings and quibblings for me, that I know not where to have him ; by G—d, I would slit the tongue of every such knave.” Walter looked on him with astonishment, aware that his wit was ill-timed. “ There was that cursed babbling fool, Guy !” continued the Captain, “ was always playing off his jokes, when I was at Castle Baynard. I hope the devil hath him !”

Though my Lord of Misrule did not lack courage, this speech, and the kind wish with which it was concluded, threw him into a profuse perspiration, and he wished himself fairly out of the hostelrie, inwardly cursing dame fortune for throwing him in the way of such a brute. Walter easily divincd the disagre-

ableness of his situation, and pleaded, as an excuse for his companions not joining the party, that they had already had more than enough.

“ Well, well!” said Borlais, quite unconcerned about it, filling a horn with ale—“ Let piping Andrew sing us a stave !”

The soldier immediately obeyed, and executed his part in tolerable style, but his comrades, joining chorus in the last verse, produced the most jarring discord. When they had concluded, they thumped with their clenched fists upon the oaken table with such vehemence, that the very roof shook with the deafening noise. Walter was then requested to sing, and he instantly complied without hesitation, and performed with such exquisite humour and comicality, that he set them all in a roar of laughter, and completely overcame the dislike which Borlais had at first conceived for him. The potent ale which the Captain had swallowed, had the happy effect of ameliorating his bear-like, unmannerly behaviour; and, slapping Walter familiarly on the shoulder, bestowed on him the very flattering appellation of a damn'd good fellow; and afterwards began to chant himself, in a voice resembling the grunting of a boar, a lewd and indecent song, probably the production of his own debased imagination. Walter bit his lips with vexation, and endeavoured, by a pretended fit of loud coughing, to drown the words. As to poor Jaques, he was sitting on thorns; he knew the extreme delicacy of Matilda's mind, and the gallant fellow was

so perplexed and confused, that he saw not the danger his interference would involve them in ; and just as Borlais commenced the second verse, he jumped up, unable longer to contain himself, and exclaimed, to the mutual astonishment of the troopers and his own party,

“ Mort de ma vie ! Monsieur le Capitaine, consider de lady—dey vas be shock at dis horrible chanson—pah !—’tis ver foul—vile—”

“ Wheugh !” whistled Borlais, rising and advancing towards the Frenchman, with an expression of countenance almost enough to inspire terror into the heart of the most courageous.

“ And who in the name of the devil, mounseer, art thou ?” demanded he.

“ Pardon—Capitaine—” cried Jaques shrinking with alarm from his terrible looks, “ mais—but—de lady—monsieur !”

“ By G—d !—” exclaimed Borlais, staring steadfastly at him, and bursting into a loud laugh in his face, “ thou’rt that same cringing fiddling French dog, I saw at the Baron’s there in London—the very same—ha ! ha ! ha !—But I say, mounseer, where’s this lady ?—Ho !—ho !—” exclaimed he, perceiving Matilda and her maid, “ A couple of doves, by St. Dominic !” and he advanced towards them, “ I must have a peep at these delicate creatures who are afraid of a merry song !”

Walter instantly arose, and as well as his companions interposed between Borlais and the women.

“Captain Borlais!” said he in a manner which expressed his firm determination to oppose him, in case he persisted, “One of these women is Jaques’s wife,—the other is likely to become my partner, and therefore I must beg thou wilt not offend them, but let them remain unmolested and in peace, as they have been during the whole evening.”

“Hoho,” said Borlais coolly, “I suppose this is one of thy jokes—but it won’t pass. I’ll see these woman, I’m resolved; so stand on one side, or by the mass, I’ll drill a hole in thy doublet with my rapier!” drawing his sword at the same time.

Walter, undaunted by his menaces, instantly followed his example, and stood on his defence; his companions, not excepting Guy, encouraged by Walter’s intrepidity and their affection for Matilda, did the same, determined to protect their charge with their lives. The troopers seeing the strenuous opposition their leader met with, drew up on each side of him, sword in hand.

Matilda was struck speechless with horror at this alarming scene, and the piercing shrieks of Maude added to its terrors.

“As soldiers and men,” said the brave Walter, “ye are bound to protect these women, whom your conduct hath already fearfully alarmed; and it will stain your names with everlasting dishonour, if ye proceed to insult them. Therefore a’ God’s name desist, sheathe your swords and ——”

"We want none of thy preaching!" roared Borlais, brandishing his sword, "so let us pass."

"Nay, by heaven thou shalt not pass here, without first taking our lives, and be our blood upon your heads!" exclaimed Walter.

Borlais gnashed his teeth, enraged at this opposition, and commanding his men to charge, aimed a furious blow at Walter's head, who however dexterously parried it and pressed upon his antagonist.

Rendered desperate by the dangerous situation in which they were placed, and the certain destruction which threatened them from the superiority of the number of their opponents, the efforts they made in the struggle, seemed almost superhuman, and two of the troopers soon lay stretched upon the floor of the hostelrie. The simple Gilbert exhibited no less courage than his comrades, and his blows soon proved that he was as expert in the use of the sword, as the spear. Finding himself however opposed to one of the troopers, who appeared to be a superior swordsman and who began to gain upon him, he pretended to aim a blow at his head, and when his antagonist guarded that part of his person, the Gosling, instead of striking, dropped his weapon, and with a curious manœuvre seized the trooper by the throat; this sudden and unexpected mode of attack threw the other off his guard, and Gilbert taking advantage of his confusion, dropped his one hand and grasped him firmly by the girdle with it, and putting forth all the strength

of his long and sinewy arms, hurled the man with a violence which stunned him, among the blazing logs upon the hearth ; but, in stooping to regain his sword, after exhibiting this feat of his extraordinary strength, he unfortunately received a severe cut on the left shoulder which laid it bare ; this wound occasioned him considerable pain, although it did not intimidate or prevent him from still using his best exertions.

It was impossible, however, for the prowess of so few to contend for any length of time against the power of so many. Their strength began to fail, and they were gradually giving way before their cowardly assailants. Walter, who from the commencement had fought hand to hand with the infuriate Borlais, lost his sword in endeavouring to parry a furious stroke from his opponent, and his foot slipping at the same moment in the blood which was flowing from the mortal wounds of the two troopers, he fell backwards. It was then that Matilda, aroused from her fearful stupor by the imminent danger which threatened Walter, and urged on by the sudden impulse of her affectionate heart, rushed forward and threw herself between Borlais and his intended victim.

“ Hold—for mercy’s sake—hold !” cried the beauteous maiden, extending her arms, her face pale with terror, and her fair hair flowing wildly down her neck and shoulders.

At sight of this lovely apparition, Borlais drew back, impressed with mingled sentiments of fear, respect, and admiration. The combatants on both sides

held their arms, and the clatter of their weapons ceased to ring discordant upon the ear.

“ I implore ye,” said Matilda, in a supplicating tone, as soon as the silence permitted her to speak ; “ I implore ye to desist from further violence. Put up your swords, which ye have unlawfully drawn against the King’s liege subjects. Add not murder to insult. Your conduct hath been highly reprehensible, and the only way ye can make atonement for the wrong ye have done, is to permit us egress from this hostelrie without molestation.”

“ Fair Lady !” cried Borlais, sheathing his sword, and apparently softened by her language and sudden appearance ; “ mine eyes do much deceive me, or I really behold Fitz-Walter’s daughter, Matilda the Fair ! If thou art indeed that lady, I humbly sue thy pardon for my rashness.”

Pleased with this change in the Captain’s behaviour, whose language was that of a penitent, Walter and his companions with one voice proclaimed him right in his supposition, believing that the remembrance of the hospitality he had formerly received from the Baron, inclined him favourably towards his daughter.

With a countenance and manner as agreeable as he could possibly assume, Borlais advanced towards Matilda, who was equally deceived as her followers by his hypocrisy :

“ Permit me to offer my services to you, my Lady,” said he.

“ Captain Borlais,” interrupted Matilda, with dig-

nity, "these are my followers, and I need no other services than theirs."

"Nay, sweet Lady!" Matilda frowned at the freedom of his language, "my followers," continued he, "will take especial care of thine;" and making a signal to his men, they surrounded and secured her brave defenders before they were aware or able to defend themselves, their attention having been called to Gilbert, who had fainted through loss of blood; "and I," resumed he then, smiling with inward satisfaction at his success, "shall have the honour of conducting Matilda the Fair to the feet of my sovereign!"

Matilda beheld with horror her forlorn and helpless situation; her hopeless heart sunk within her with apprehension, and a fearful tremor pervaded her delicate frame as she dropped on one knee before the unfeeling Borlais, and endeavoured by tears and supplication to turn him from his cruel purpose. But she implored him in vain. He knew how infatuated the King had been with the beauteous Matilda, whom he and all the world supposed was dead, and he expected a rich reward from his sovereign for the ungallant part he intended to act in bearing her to his arms; and, unmoved by her language, or the despair which was depicted in the countenance of Matilda, he replied:—

"An' thou wert to weep till morn, thou could'st not make me yield thee up; and by the rood, my Lady, methinks it is not so sad a thing to be the favourite of a King——"

Overwhelmed with alarm at this language, Matilda swooned away in the arms of Maude and of her page, who were almost equally terrified with their mistress.

“Thou heartless and unfeeling brute!” cried Walter, beholding the effect which Borlais’ language had produced on Matilda; “Darest thou execute thy threat, and sacrifice this fair and virtuous maiden for the sake of lucre? Art thou so dead to every feeling of humanity and honour, and think’st thou such an injury will pass unpunished?”

“Gag him!” roared Borlais furiously; “but no,” continued he, regarding Walter with a sneer, who was firmly secured by two of the troopers, “I’ll e’en argue with thee. Thou must know I care not for the consequences, and thou mistakest me rarely an’ thou dost suppose I am one of those who are to be frightened by the prickings of conscience. Conscience, psha! a bugbear to scare your womanish man and beardless boy withal. As for humanity, damme, I think I can’t show it better than by placing this fair damsel under the protection of the King, and out of the reach of misfortune, instead of letting her wander about the country like a beggar; and to let such a prize escape to be picked up by another, why that would be a mere piece of folly, by G—d! Besides, my honour bids me take charge of her, to preserve her from the hands of brutes who might chance to fall in with her.”

“I could expect no less than such indifference and ribaldry from one whose crimes, no doubt, have rendered him callous,” said Walter; “yet, remember,

Captain Borlais, this lady is affianced to a brave and valiant knight, who is now, happily for thee but unhappily for her, in a distant clime ; but he will soon return, and then how thy coward heart will shrink within thee, when, like a dastard cur, he whips thee with an iron lash. Nay, death shall be deemed by thee a sweet release from the fire of his anger and the fierce glance of his kindling eye."

The visible emotion in the Captain's dark, savage visage, proved that these words had made a deep impression upon him ; but such an one as aroused his fury—not his pity ; and, uttering the most horrid imprecations, he drew his sword, determined to fell the brave Walter to the earth, although he was now utterly unable to defend himself, the troopers having by this time secured his arms with cords behind him. Undaunted by the rage and diabolic oaths of Borlais, Walter stepped forward and bravely dared the stroke.

" Why dost thou not strike, right valiant Sir ?" cried Walter, seeing Borlais hesitate, and sheathe his weapon again, for even his brutality had not yet arrived at such a pitch as to allow him coolly to sacrifice an unarmed man. " 'Twere not so vile, so ignoble, to glut thy vengeance on me, as to oppress this fair and helpless Lady."

He was prevented from proceeding by the voice of Matilda, who had again returned to a consciousness of her truly pitiable situation. With tears streaming from her eyes, and her lovely bosom heaving with

sights, she bade Walter parley no longer, or tempt the rage of a monster who was cruelly resolved upon her destruction.

“ Ye have already, my brave defenders, exerted yourselves to the utmost,” continued Matilda. “ I thank ye for your zealous love. Now, let these men, who are a disgrace to the name of soldiers, reap the harvest of their glorious victory—let valiant Borlais bear me to the King, and receive the reward of his gallantry and valour. That power which hath shielded me in the hour of danger, will not desert me now. I put my trust in heaven!” said she, with resignation, clasping her hands, and looking upwards with tearful eyes.

Neither the distress, the innocence, or the beauty of Matilda, had the least effect upon the hardened hearts of the troopers and their leader, and they immediately proceeded to secure their prisoners for their intended journey. By the remonstrances and entreaties of Matilda, however, they permitted Gilbert, who was so severely wounded, to remain behind in the care of the good host; into whose hand Matilda took an opportunity of slipping a bourse to pay him for their entertainment, charging him to take especial care of the Gosling; for, although overwhelmed with sorrow herself, the tender heart of Matilda still felt for the sufferings of others.

The troopers soon got their horses with those of their prisoners in readiness, and they were just on the

point of starting, having fastened the fainting Matilda, whose resolution and firmness began to fail her, behind one of the troopers, her followers being each fixed on his own beast, led by a trooper, when they perceived a body of horsemen approaching the hostrie at full gallop.

CHAPTER XX.

Paul. That she is living,—
Were it but told you, should be hooted at
Like an old tale; but it appears she lives.

Her. Tell me, mine own,
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived?

Winter's Tale.

BORLAIS saw the impossibility of escaping the horsemen, and therefore determined, at all events, to remain till they came up; fearing that the host, whom he had no cause to believe was his friend, or the wounded Gilbert might spur them on by their woful representations to pursue him and his troopers. They presently arrived, and their leader politely required the host to direct him the nearest road to Falconberg Castle. He was a young man of extraordinary fine figure, and his muscular and well-proportioned limbs, proved him of no common mould or strength. His armour was of a dead black, and the shadowy plume which waved mournfully in his casque, completely obscured his features from examination, although they decidedly bore the marks of grief and sorrow, and a death-like paleness overspread the

whole. His address was courteous and prepossessing, and when he pronounced the place of their destination, Matilda looked upon him as a friend sent by heaven for her deliverance, and struggling violently, slipped aside the kerchief which had been tied over her mouth, and shrieked aloud for help. Borlais was alarmed by this exclamation, and turning furiously round, bade the trooper "Gag that mad woman." However, the confusion which appeared in his countenance, excited the suspicion of the stranger who demanded the reason of this outcry.

"A wretched woman, Sir Knight," replied Borlais, "who together with these others, her accomplices, have been concerned in a horrid murder. Remorse at having committed the crime, and her dread of the punishment that awaits her, has overcome her reason!"

"Alas, poor soul!" exclaimed the knight in the most compassionate tone, and was passing on, to the great relief of Borlais, who thought he had satisfied his curiosity. But he was mistaken, for riding as near as he could to the troopers who surrounded their prisoners, the stranger observed that all the men as well as the women were gagged.

"Prithee," said he, turning to Borlais, "is this other woman, and are these four men also mad, that thou hast bound and gagged them in this fashion?"

This unexpected question quite disconcerted him, and pretending to be offended at the doubts expressed

by the knight, replied that he had orders for what he had done, that he was a servant of the King's, and was answerable for his actions to none but his sovereign.

“Thou could'st not possibly have given thyself a worse recommendation,” said the knight, “than that of being the tool of such a tyrant as King John.”

“This is treason!” exclaimed Borlais in a rage, seeing his purpose was likely to be frustrated by the interposition of the knight.

“Had'st thou not better seize and gag me too?” said the other with a sneer: “There is so much mystery in thy behaviour,” continued he, “that I consider it my duty as a true knight to inquire into the truth of what thou hast asserted; for, by St. George, I suspect there is more treachery in this affair than I at present dream of; therefore, I command thee, unbind these people, that they may answer a few questions I would put to them. No resistance,” perceiving Borlais was not inclined to obey him, “for I am prepared.”

He drew his sword, and commanded his men to surround the troopers; while Borlais, muttering curses, unwillingly untied the bandage from Walter's mouth, who no sooner found he was able to enjoy the use of his speech, one of the greatest blessings they could bestow on him, than he bawled out:—

“Sir Knight, this Captain Borlais is the lying'st knave; we none of us, thank God, have been con-

cerned in any murder, though, I must confess, I feel heartily inclined to cut his throat for the trouble and affright he hath caused my Lady."

"Thy Lady?" said the knight rather surprised, for neither of the women appeared by their habiliments to be of that quality.

"Even so, Sir Knight, that young Lady who—Good heavens! assist her!" cried Walter, seeing that she had fainted, and instantly leaping from his horse, ran to her aid, followed by the knight.

"Gracious heavens! What do I see?" exclaimed the latter, as he held the lifeless Matilda in his arms; "What sweet vision is this I behold, that cometh to bless my sight one moment, to break my heart the next. Wake up, wake up, sweet Lady, from this sad semblance of death!"

"Eustace!" murmured Matilda languidly, as she unclosed her eyes and gazed upon the pale countenance of her lover; for, although she did not recognise his features at first, being disguised in such a gloomy suit, yet she knew his voice and manners well when he approached nearer to her and commanded Borlais to release them; but her feelings overcame her, she was unable to speak, and would have fallen from her seat, had not the strap which bound her to the trooper, prevented her.

"Beloved Matilda!" cried De Mountfort, embracing her tenderly, while an involuntary tear started and rolled down his manly cheek; "thou art as one risen

from the dead ; I have mourned thy loss, and lived but to avenge thee. Oh ! blessed hour, that brings thee to my arms again after so long a separation. But come, love, let me lead thee into this hostelrie ; thou hast now no more to fear."

With a joyful heart he conducted her thither, and was soon joined by her attendants, who all participated in the joy of De Mountfort's return, and particularly at his fortunate appearance at such a juncture. De Mountfort afterwards, to the great delight of Borlais and his troopers, who expected no less than to be suspended from the branches of some of the surrounding trees for their baseness, bade them depart ; admonishing them to forget not in future, that it was the duty of every man, and especially those who pursued the honourable profession of arms, to succour, and not to oppress the injured and the helpless. Although Borlais and most of his men laughed in their sleeves at this preaching, as they termed it, there were several whose hearts, less hardened than their fellows, sincerely felt and gratefully acknowledged this lenient behaviour of the knight, of which they were so unworthy.

The delight which the lovers mutually experienced at this unexpected meeting did not vent itself in words. Their joy was unutterable, but the tender looks which passed between them, spoke more than words. The pressure of the trembling hand, the blood which mantled in and flushed their cheeks,

their short breathing, occasioned by the quick and joyful palpitation of their hearts, proved how blissful were the present moments to these fond lovers.

The host, when he learned the quality of his guests, was afraid that his former familiarity might have given offence, and stammered out as good an apology as he possibly could. But Matilda easily conceived his feelings, and assured him, far from giving offence, that his good humour had afforded her a great deal of pleasure, and the excellent manner in which he had served them, deserved her highest commendation; and bade him, with the most amiable condescension, resume his place at the board, and treat them as he had done before. Poor Gilbert, who was the greatest sufferer, evinced the most heartfelt joy at the escape of his Lady, and assured her, when she commiserated him, that the wound he had received in her service, was rather a source of pleasure than pain to him; he was proud of it.

“ By my fay!” cried Guy, “ the Gosling hath grown quite valiant and courtier-like. An’ my Lord doth but smite him athwart both shoulders, for this gash upon one, ‘tis two to one but he’ll become a finer knight than any who bestrides a courser.”

“ And I’ll make thee mine esquire, Guy,” replied Gilbert, “ that I may never lack wit.”

“ And I’ll be thine herald too,” said Guy, “ and emblazon thy arms on thy targe:—a gosling argent with the left wing bleeding, on a field vert; a bouquet

of Michaelmas daisies for a crest ; and, for thy device, ‘ I rose by a fall.’ ”

They all laughed at this sally of the fool’s, and being now restored to good humour, and quite recovered from the effects of their fears, they all arose, and taking farewell of Gilbert, whom they consigned to the care of the honest keeper of the hostelrie, (who had already applied an efficacious and healing balm to his wound,) they departed for Falconberg Castle. Yet, notwithstanding the good quarters in which they left Gilbert, he would have preferred accompanying them ; for the fortunate issue of this adventure had so enlivened him, that he felt not the severity of his wound.

Matilda, riding beside her beloved Sir Eustace, recounted to him all that had transpired during his absence ; and he offered up a silent prayer of thanksgiving to heaven for the preservation of the mistress of his heart, amidst the many dangers which had threatened her. His joy was greatly increased by the information of Fitz-Walter’s escape from confinement, and his secret preparations, in conjunction with the Barons, to demand restitution of the King.

To account for his sudden reappearance, Sir Eustace informed Matilda that he had long suspected from John’s continued silence something mysterious had occurred, of which it was the King’s wish to keep him in ignorance. Latterly, however, several rumours concerning his attack upon Fitz-Walter had reached

his ears, but to these he had given no credit, not being able possibly to imagine that the King could be guilty of such baseness and treachery, and particularly as he had received no intelligence from Castle Baynard, which he expected if such a cause of complaint really existed ; he therefore considered it merely as a false report, raised by some enemy of the King.

But he was unfortunately soon convinced, that what he had heard was but too true. A holy friar, whose age and venerable appearance commanded implicit belief, who had been in London, and was an eye-witness of the destruction of Castle Baynard, called at Sir Eustace's palace in his peregrinations through France, and informed him (ignorant of the connexion and tender sentiments which bound him to the house of Fitz-Walter) of every sad particular ; the conflagration of the castle, the incarceration of the Baron, and lastly, the dreadful and appalling fate of his loved Matilda.

De Mountfort dreaded some dire mishap, and could not summon resolution sufficient to inquire whether his mistress had escaped ; but the moment the friar, with tears trembling in his eyes at the mournful recollection, described her perilous situation—the horrid piercing shrieks of the spectators, who saw yet could not save her—the distracted maiden and her faithful page, extending their arms in vain to implore succour—it almost overcame his reason. He stormed and raved with all the wildness of despair ; and, in the anguish of his heart, called down the bitterest curses

upon the head of the tyrant whose villainy had blighted his fondest hopes.

Without awaiting the commands of the King, whom he now so justly hated and despised, he immediately quitted the kingdom of France for England; and, careless of his life, he only wished to release the oppressed father of his lost Matilda, and to take vengeance on the King. In order to escape observation, he had exchanged his gay suit of polished steel for the gloomy one he wore at present, being more suited to his melancholy frame of mind; and when he so opportunely arrived to the rescue of his Matilda, whose death he had so bitterly deplored, he was proceeding to Falconberg Castle, to arrange some plan with its brave owner, with whose principles he was well acquainted, for the effecting his laudable purpose; knowing the relation in which he stood to Fitz-Walter, and his particular friendship for that unfortunate nobleman.

What a delightful change had taken place in the course of the last few hours, in the prospects both of De Mountfort and his mistress! Matilda now cantered gaily and happily beside her lover, her beauteous blue eyes modestly cast down, and her cheeks blushing deeply at the constant and enraptured gaze of Sir Eustace, who could not sufficiently admire her graceful and elegant appearance, unaided by art and unadorned by dress, for the garb in which she was disguised was of the simplest and coarsest materials.

The hearty bursts of laughter which issued ever

and anon from their followers, who kept some twenty or thirty yards distant, proved that they also were happy in meeting so many old acquaintances. Walter, who was a stranger to De Mountfort's men, soon wound himself into their good graces, by his jocularity and good humour, which seemed to flow faster for the partial damp which had been so lately thrown upon his spirits.

"I say, sweetheart," cried he, addressing himself to Maude, who was riding behind her dear Monsieur Jaques, "what a fortunate escape thy lover hath had. Didst thou not see how valiantly he laid about him with his long a-pay, as he calls it?"

"Oh! no," said Maude, shuddering at the recollection, at the same time involuntarily squeezing her dear man so tightly round the waist, that his complaisance could hardly restrain him from complaining of the ardour of her embrace; "I shut both my eyes, and seriked out—I was so frightened!"

"Poor thing!" exclaimed Guy, "she thought every stroke would deprive her of a lover; and then what a sad thing it would have been, Walter, for either thou or I should have been obliged to have wedded her out of compassion."

"Compassion! quotha," cried Maude, tossing her head, "I would not take a fool to husband."

"Nay, but thou would'st take a husband to fool!" replied Guy.

"When thou get'st thee a wife, Guy, thou'l't save

her that trouble," retorted Maude, " tho' I fear me thy wit will never win thee one."

" Heaven forbid it may!" said Guy, with the most ridiculous gravity, " for my wit and my wife will never agree; my wit being my mistress, whom I being no wise jealous, keep for others courting, and live by their favour—"

" Thou should'st rather call thy wit, thy wife, being so wedded to it, that death alone can part thee," said Walter, " and every sprightly Sally—thy mistress. Call'st thou not this wit, Jaques?"

" Point de tout!" answered the Frenchman, who was quite at a loss as to the meaning of a single word of their quibbling; and being unintelligible, he set it down as sheer nonsense.

" Pointed too!—ay—very good—like thy long a-pay, Mounseer, ey?" cried Walter, mistaking his meaning, and bursting out into a loud laugh.

In this pleasant manner the time flew fast, and they speedily arrived at Falconberg Castle, where Sir Eustace and Matilda were received with pleasure and all due honour, by the amiable lady of the castle. Sir Richard Falconberg, together with Fitz-Walter, were absent, being at a general assemblage of the Barons, whose forces were at a considerable distance from the castle.

After partaking of a substantial repast, in company with the ladies, De Mountfort took leave of Lady Falconberg, and bidding a tender adieu to his fair

mistress, quitted the castle to join the Barons. Matilda prayed him, by his love, to stand beside her dear father in every danger, and bring him safe to her arms again; and warned him not heedlessly to risk his own life, and whispered, while she hung fondly on his arm, how often she would think of him, and beseech heaven to shield him in the fight.

CHAPTER XXI.

It makes me weep to see him look so sad,
And changes all my merriment to grief—

THE affection of Sir Eustace induced him to send continual notices to Matilda, of the success of the confederacy under the command of her father, but since the last information he had sent her concerning their flattering reception in London, she had heard nothing of their movements, and began to fear that the good fortune which had attended them in their expedition against Northampton, and in the taking of Bedford, had deserted them.

In the agreeable conversation of Lady Falconberg, who endeavoured, by assuming an appearance of tranquillity, to quiet her apprehensions, Matilda found great consolation.

“ If any thing of importance had chanced since their arrival in the city of London,” said this Lady, “ thou may’st be assured, cousin, we should have had speedy intimation thereof. I rather think our knights intend a sweet surprise by their sudden appearance.”

“ Dost think so, my Lady?” said Matilda, in a

manner that expressed her own doubt, adding, with a sigh, “ I wish it may be so!”

But she knew what an affectionate wife Lady Falconberg was; and, upon mature deliberation, was convinced, if there had been the least danger to be apprehended, that Lady would not have been able to conceal the pain it would have occasioned her, and therefore concluded, that her own fears were merely the effect of her excessive love, and the nervous irritability of her mind, occasioned by her late trials. In a few days her apprehensions were happily dissipated by the arrival of Walter at the head of his archers, for he, as well as Jaques and Guy, had preferred joining their Lord, to remaining in inactivity at Falconberg Castle.

“ Rare tidings, my boys, rare tidings!” exclaimed he, as he rode full gallop into the court-yard, amid the huzzas of the vassals. To the inquiries of those around him, concerning the welfare of Sir Richard and his noble companions in arms, he replied, that they were all well. The shouts of the vassals reached the ears of Lady Falconberg and Matilda, who experienced mingled sensations of trembling expectation and anxiety, to learn the long-expected tidings. Walter had a feeling heart, and knowing the delight he should impart, he hastily answered every question of the vassals, and quickly appeared before the ladies.

“ All’s well, honoured Ladies!” said Walter, doffing his cap—“ Not a scratch nor a scar——”

“ And are they coming ?” asked both Ladies in a breath.

“ They are on the road, my Ladies ———”

“ Is De Clifford at liberty ?” said Matilda.

“ And do they come from London ?” asked Lady Falconberg, ere he could reply to the first question. Walter could not resist smiling at their eagerness, and replied, that the knight was free, but that they did not come from London.

“ No, no, my Ladies,” continued he, “ we soon quitted London, for when the King heard the Barons were so joyfully received there, and that every nobleman and gentleman was flocking to them, he was in great terror ; his stubbornness began to yield a little ; and at last, finding they were so strong they could make him comply willy-nilly, his Grace put a good face on the matter, and assured them he was graciously pleased to grant their demands. And so, my Ladies, after a little cutting and shuffling on his part, they agreed to meet at Runimede. And thither all the Barons and their forces marched, cautiously preparing against a surprise, for they knew the King too well to place much confidence in him. For two days we lay encamped there, without any sign of his Grace’s coming, and the Barons began to suspect he intended to play them a trick ; however, at last he came, and then there was a great deal of debating with the King’s commissioners ; but, my Lord convinced them he knew what he was about, and was not to be talked out of his senses, and so, in a few

days, the King signed and sealed the charter all in a hurry. Oh! my Ladies, an' ye had heard the shouts and rejoicing, when my Lord received the charter, and holding it out, exclaimed, while tears of joy filled his eyes, 'England is free,'—egad! I'm not given to whimpering, but I felt somehow—I could'n't help laughing, while the tears ran down my cheeks!"

"Thank heaven, this contest hath ended without bloodshed!" said the gentle Matilda, who was heartily rejoiced at the happy issue; and after having learned every thing Walter knew, and his supposition, that the knights would arrive in the course of three or four hours, they permitted him to retire, than which nothing could have possibly given him more pleasure; for the craving of his appetite, not having eaten for many hours, became exceeding pressing. As he sallied from the apartment, Maude purposely threw herself in his way.

"Ah! sweetheart," cried Walter, "don't fret thyself, thou'l not die a maid this time. Monsieur Jaques and his long a-pay are on the road, and thou'l be married anon. Come, buss me for these tidings; wilt thou not? There's a good wench," said he, saluting her; "and now I'll thank thee, to introduce me to a cold capon, or a venison pasty, and a bucket or so of ale, to lay the dust I've swallowed."

When they heard the distant sound of the brazen trumpets, which proclaimed the approach of the knights, the ladies could scarcely restrain themselves from rushing forth, and meeting them beyond the

castle walls. Arm-in-arm, with hearts palpitating with joy, they gaily ascended a turret, from whence they could behold the polished arms of the knights and their vassals, glittering in the rays of the sun, as they wound among the hills which surrounded Falconberg Castle ; now rising o'er their summits—now sinking in the vales below.

“ Look, dear cousin,” said Lady Falconberg, “ dost see that tall, red, wavering plume ? That is Falconberg !”

“ Yes, yes ; I see,” replied Matilda, eagerly. “ And that black one is De Mountfort’s. Bless me ! how very, very slow they move. Oh ! that I were that page who walks beside him, that I might take his dear hand in mine and gently press it.”

“ My eyes deceive me, coz,” cried the other, laughing, “ or I see two knights with black plumes in their helms. Is it another lover of thine, Matilda, or is it only the shadow of thy true knight ?”

“ St. Mary !” exclaimed Matilda, blushing deeply at this raillery—“ I vow so there is—why—who—Oh !” recollecting herself, “ that is doubtless our noble friend Sir Arthur de Clifford.”

Matilda was right in her conjecture, and soon had the pleasure of seeing him enter the court-yard, in company with her father, Sir Richard Falconberg and De Mountfort. For instantly, on his arrival in London, Fitz-Walter, who found innumerable friends there, had succeeded in liberating the generous knight.

Happy was the meeting of these affectionate and

virtuous ladies with these noble knights, who, on their part, experienced no less felicity in being welcomed by their endearing smiles, and they passed the remainder of the day in festivity and rejoicing.

Fitz-Walter, whom the King had been pleased, or more properly compelled, to reinstate in all his possessions and privileges, again enjoyed tranquillity and domestic peace, in the midst of his dearest friends.

Matilda sometimes thought on her past dangers and vicissitudes, but these reflections served only to enhance the pleasure of the present moments, by the comparison ; and her time passed on in the most uninterrupted and agreeable manner, in the company and endearing conversation of her beloved Eustace ; who now in the tenderest and most affectionate terms, urged her to yield to her father's wishes, and his own ardent desire, and without further delay to bestow on him her hand and heart.

Matilda's affection for her lover was too sincere, and she herself too artless and amiable, to cause him pain by hesitating to comply, and with ineffable sweetness and modesty she acquiesced in his request.

Splendid preparations was speedily made at Falconberg Castle by the delighted Baron, and the nuptials of Sir Eustace de Mountfort and Matilda the Fair, were celebrated under the happiest auspices. An immense number of the nobility, and gallant knights with their ladies, honoured the ceremony with their presence ; all congratulating Sir Eustace on his good fortune, in obtaining a bride, whose unequalled

charms had inspired even his sovereign with love. The festivity and rejoicing continued fourteen days. There was jousting and tilting, and all kinds of martial sports and pastimes, and in the evenings there were masks and mumming, in which Walter and Guy took no inconsiderable part. Monsieur Jaques, too, participated in the joy, for he had prevailed upon pretty Maude, by the sanction of her lady, to make him a happy man, on the same day which united her to De Mountfort.

The Gosling, whose services had not been forgotten by Lady Matilda in her prosperity, being recovered from the effects of his wound, was kindly received by her, as was also the vine-dresser's daughter, Marian, whom he brought under his arm, and introduced as his spouse, affording much food for Walter's wit.

Sir Arthur de Clifford, whose generosity had been the prime source of this happy change, was the only one whose heart was sorrowful. He did not envy his friends the joyous smiles which decked their happy countenances, for he had risked his liberty and life, to secure their happiness; but when he witnessed their felicity, he reflected how often, in former days, his fancy had painted such bliss as this, and made himself the hero of the delusive vision; and when he thought of what he might have been, and what he was—he wept—the noble De Clifford wept—and there was not one who knew him, but would have wiped away those tears,—or failing, have mingled their own with his; for all who knew him, loved him.

Unwilling to damp the pleasures of his friends, he deceived them by assuming a calmness and placidity which ill accorded with the poignant, unconquerable grief, which preyed upon his heart ; and felt relieved, when in the solitude of his chamber he could give it vent, unseen and unheard. Fitz-Walter, who knew the cause of his sorrows, endeavoured by every means to keep him from reflection, hoping that mingling in the various diversions might alleviate, if not entirely wean him from, his melancholy. But, in the midst of the merriment, the Baron remarked a gloominess would suddenly overspread the features of De Clifford, and then give way again to an air of cheerfulness, when he found himself observed; as the flying clouds do sometimes momentarily obscure the enlivening rays of the sun, and pass away again.

When all the gay company had bidden adieu to their noble entertainers, and departed from Falconberg Castle, leaving the youthful pair to the free enjoyment of each other's company, De Clifford likewise prepared to take his leave, much against the inclination of De Mountfort and his Lady, whose grateful hearts acknowledged how deeply they were indebted to him, and fain would have repaid him, by making every exertion to solace and render him happy. But he was inexorable, and not even the persuasive eloquence of Lady Matilda could induce him to remain.

“ And whither wilt thou bend thy course, Sir Arthur ? ” said Fitz-Walter, convinced that no argument would win him to stay. “ That we may at least

hear of thy welfare, as thou dost still persist in leaving us."

"Not far from hence," replied De Clifford, "I intend to dedicate the remnant of my days to God. To seek, in the seclusion of monastic life, that tranquillity and solitude which is most desirable to my heart. The world hath now no happiness, no allurements for me; I shall quit it without a sigh. Adieu, my dearest friends," continued he, alternately embracing Fitz-Walter and De Mountfort, the acuteness of whose feelings deprived them of the power of speech, "and may every happiness attend ye. Nay, weep not, fair Lady," turning to Lady Matilda, who could not conceal her emotion at this mournful separation—"I shall be happy; and if the prayers of such a mortal are acceptable to heaven, thou shalt not lack my most fervent and heart-felt, for thy felicity!"

"What a noble heart that man possesses!" cried De Mountfort, when Sir Arthur had quitted them—"and from my soul I pity him. Oh! what a heart must she possess who hath trifled with the love of such a man!"

As De Clifford quitted the Baron, he met Walter, who had heard of his intention of leaving the castle.

"And art thou, in verity, going to leave us, Arthur—Sir Arthur?" said Walter, correcting himself, for he had been so used to call De Clifford, Arthur, that he found a difficulty in saying otherwise.

"Even so, Walter," replied De Clifford—"but ere I go, I would speak a word or two with thee."

“ Nay—but—by St. Dominic!” cried Walter, looking him earnestly in the face; and foreboding no good from its mournful expression—“ we shall meet again?” De Clifford shook his head. “ No—why what hath offended thee? I thought thou wert quite rid of thy melancholy, and was hugging myself in the discovery of thy cheerfulness, and now o’ the sudden, thou art sad again, and ——”

“ Hear me,” said De Clifford, taking Walter by the hand. “ Sorrow hath unnerved me, and I would not remain amidst my friends, to imbitter their joys by my presence; for I cannot participate in their pleasures. In society, I am as a scathed and withered tree, standing amidst others of rich and verdant foliage, surrounded by flowering shrubs, that were better rooted up, than mar the beauty of the rest, by my desolate appearance. I am not tired of the world, that I would quit it, for I have found few enemies and many friends; but the balm of friendship cannot heal my wounds. Thou know’st my story.” Walter warmly pressed his hand, with a look of heartfelt compassion; and De Clifford drew a small packet, carefully sealed, from his breast. “ This document,” said he, presenting it to Walter, “ contains the grant of a small estate in my possession. Take it—enjoy it for my sake. It is a debt I owe thee; a small mark of my gratitude for thy humanity, and the disinterested kindness and friendship thou hast shewn me, even when thou did’st suppose me thy inferior, or at best thy equal.”

Walter struggled in vain to conceal his agitation, at the generosity of the unfortunate De Clifforde, and burst into a flood of tears; Sir Arthur shook him kindly by the hand, and with difficulty added,

“ Farewell, Walter! and sometimes in thy calmer moments think on the broken-hearted De Clifforde !”

THE END

LONDON .
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES,
Northumberland-court.

